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Public service announcements and their influence upon system of values of children (research of concept of "family" formation)

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Abstract

The paper focuses upon problem of public service announcements' (PSA) influence upon formation of system of values in the child's consciousness. Today we can view the mass media as well as advertising messages as a powerful tool of the society's system of values formation, including children's system of values. Children are seen as members of the society with unstable self-consciousness and world-view that is why they undergo the influence of the modern information media to their fullest extent. The author builds a model of the concept of family as a crucial part of Russian conceptsphere, which is translated by the PSA texts.

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1. Introduction

The generation of Russians born in the very beginning of the XXI is formed in a different information medium compared to all previous generations. The communicative space, mastered by a child, is constructed based on interaction of different discourses, which often contradict one another (traditional national / western; real / virtual; didactic / entertaining, etc.). Children of today, thanks to different media resources, take part in a broad spectrum of communicative events. Semantic space of the current communications becomes a powerful factor of forming the child's picture of the world. Diagnostics of the processes that influence formation of language consciousness, communicative practices and attitudes becomes an important linguistic task. Monitoring of the child's values (communicative, moral, and social), translated and engrained by the available information media is a significant issue.

One of the communication forms, influencing the consciousness of children, is advertising, including both commercial and social announcements. Advertising texts become a type of reflector and re-translator; on the one hand, authors of the advertising messages often use some stereotypical perceptions of different aspects of the society life, on the other hand, they convey some mental mindsets.

Thus, public service announcement (PSA) reflects customs, ethical standards and values of our society. Moreover, thanks to its high persuasive emotional effect, PSA can ultimately change the system of values and lifestyle of a person; reform his or her ideals and allegiances. Children are affected by this influence more than adults are. In the process of his or her growing up and socialization, the person, both consciously and subconsciously, installs different information filters to cut off a part of information received. However, the child is not always able to perform such mental procedure. That is why media messages influence the child's picture of the world dramatically.

The research focuses upon problem of advertisements influencing formation of system of attitudes towards different society concepts, particularly the concept of the family. Perception of the family, its stability, determines viability and prosperity of the nation. PSAs can have both positive and negative effect on viability of the concept of the family. Social and commercial advertisements advocate for certain behavioral models and family relationships patterns that can drastically change family life traditions, which root in a peasants' type of the family: attachment to the group, the community, respecting the elder members of the family. On the other hand, advertising may be seen as an institution that can revive the said traditions and save the family as a social entity.

The research is aimed at comparing the language concept of family with its realizations in PSA texts. As E.S. Kubryakova mentioned, the language is the most effective means to get access to the consciousness, "a way how language sees the world" [1], nearly all mental mindsets are reflected in the texts.

2. Method

In the course of the research, I analyzed 105 texts of Russian PSAs, mostly outdoor and printed ones. The comparative analysis was performed using lexicographic sources (about 10 dictionaries of different types), Russian proverbs and sayings, results of associative and receptive experiments, commercial advertising texts.

The methodology of this research is based on cognitive linguistics' tools, comprising its basic categories: concept and frame. Summarizing different approaches to the concept definition, I can conclude the following: concept is a mental construct having a linguacultural specificity, containing, on the one hand, common perceptions of the native-speakers concerning a definite fragment of their experience; on the other hand, it includes individual knowledge, emotions, and associations, connected with this concept. This complex approach became a methodological base for the present research. There is no general definition of the concept, because it has a complex polycomponent structure. Besides the components, which constitute its structure, it includes everything that makes it a cultural fact. The present research uses the method of the concept reconstruction as a frame structure.

The hypothesis of the research is as follows: the concept of family, created using PSA texts, is different from the concept of family being a part of Russian mentality.

3. Results and discussion

Here is the model of the concept of family, reconstructed on the base of PSA texts.

Terminal 1. Nuclear family

Slot 1. Young family

A new family is a positive image, consisting of two people (a man and a woman), who have no children. The key components of the slot are **success, future, love, happiness, choice, respect**. The image is a **harmonious couple**.

Example. In the poster, we can see steps of life. The slogan consists of three elements: "Your choice. Your decision. Your **future**". The family is put on the highest step: creation of the family is a right way to happy future.

Slot 2 Maternity

Subslot 1. Planning and having children

The key components are **expectation, happiness, joy, love**. The image – **responsible and loving parents**.

Example. Charity fund, aimed at protection of family, maternity and childhood, created a poster with the slogan "We **love** YOU, we're **waiting** for you". The central symbol is a **heart**, made of the parents' hands and located on the abdomen of the pregnant woman.

Subslot 2. Mother

The key image is a **loving mother, giving life to her child**. In this case the key components are as follows: **happiness, care, energy, joy, brightness, future**.

Example. The **pregnant woman is perfection itself**. When you look at a future mother, she seems irradiating some special energy, as if some brightness comes out of her.

Subslot 3. A killer-mother

There also exists a negative image of the future mother, when a woman decides **to terminate her pregnancy**. In PSA texts, this situation is characterized with the words **death, cruelty, infanticide**.

Example 1. The abortion does not nullify pregnancy. It makes you a mother of the **dead** child and leaves its mark for life!

Example 2. Abortion is a legalized **infanticide**.

Slot 3. Paternity

Subslot 1. A defender-man

The image of the father symbolizes **the head of a family, its safety and pride**. The man is a backbone, a role model

Example 1. I have a daddy. I do not care what man he is! He is **the best** dad, because he is mine!

Example 2. There is the only thing I want - let the fairytale go on. As long as I am with daddy, I **am really safe and strong**.

Besides this, the posters deal with the importance of upbringing the child by the father: the key ideas are - **upbringing a real man, happiness of being a father, necessity of having a father**.

Example. The real men are not born, they are brought up.

Subslot 2. A debtor-man

It is a negative image of the father who has **deserted his family**, who **does not pay alimony**, or who has **made a woman get rid of a child**. PSA texts encourage fathers to remember that they have a family, that they must not forget their children and parental responsibilities. Key notions are **debtor, single mother**.

Example 1. There are no ex-children, pay your alimony!

Example 2. Husband and father **must be** in the family, not just on paper.

Abortion is a topical issue in modern Russia. PSA messages appeal to fathers, saying they must take responsibility and never let their spouse terminate her pregnancy.

Example. Be a man. Be responsible. Save your child from abortion!

Slot 4. Multi-child family

In Russia, as well as in the bulk of European countries, the family is considered multi-child if there are three or more children. PSA texts form the opinion that the **robust family** is the one, where there are two or three children. **Real happiness are children, children are our future.** The key components of this slot are **happiness, joy, responsibility, support.** The image is a **large family.**

Example 1. Priceless family is the robust one. When there are two or more children. Allow yourself a real happiness!

Example 2. One child is bliss! Two children is a real bliss! Have three children! Feel yourself really happy.

Terminal 2. Relationships in the family

This terminal is devoted to the issues of upbringing, family values and relationships of different generations.

Slot 1. Attitude towards the representatives of the older generation

The topic of expressing love to your parents, respecting the elder members of the family (grandfathers and grandmothers) is really of importance. The key components are **love, warmth, respect, gratitude**; but on the other hand, there are **loneliness and offense.**

The bulk of the PSA texts highlight the thought that children should love their parents and remember about them.

Example. Leaving the parent's nest some children do care, they never forget their mother and father, others pay attention to them only on holidays or according to the timetable, the third leave their home and remember about it too late, when there's nobody to meet them...

Slot 2. Upbringing

Very often PSA texts aim at protecting children: we need to love and protect children, because we are responsible for their lives. The key components of this slot are **attention, care, love.**

Subslot 1. Lack of care of children

There is a stereotypical situation for PSA text: lack of care can kill children or make them victims of malign influence. Adults are **role models.** The key components of this subslot are **responsibility, care, attention.**

Example. They say that children are the flowers of life. To grow a lower you must take care of it, love it and apply some effort. The same thing is with parents: they must take care of their little "flower", be loving and tender. Then in the future, it will become a great and talented person. Only our love will help children become beautiful flowers.

Subslot 2. Building family values

The issue of upbringing a child includes the necessity of creating a clear road map and values, which each parent should bring up in his or her child.

Example. The major values of life are free. One of them is a family. It is very important thing in our lives. Family are the closest, the dearest people, whom we love so much, who give us warmth and help if we are in trouble. It is our home, safe and cozy. Everyone should understand that the family is very important. Only these people will always believe in you, will give you a helping hand in any situation.

Terminal 3. Problems in the family

The topic of this terminal is connected with a range of basic social problems: family violence, divorce, addictions (smoking, drug addiction, alcohol addiction), and diseases.

Slot 1. Divorce

Divorce is a mostly widespread topic of the modern PSA.

Example. The poster appeals to the young people, telling them that they need to be more serious and responsible when making a decision to get married: "If I could start my life again, I'd have chosen you. Every second Russian marriage is dissolved. Do not hurry up!"

Slot 2. Malicious habits of parents

One more problem reflected in PSA texts deals with **malicious habits and addictions** of parents that lead to some **harmful impact** on children. The key components of the slot are **stress, problem, and addiction**.

Subslot 1. Smoking/drinking mother

All messages connected with this topic have only negative characteristics to have a bearing on the society by showing a real danger to the children's health. The image of smoking/drinking mother differs from the image of smoking/drinking father. In most cases, the mother who is an addict is pictured pregnant (so she can harm herself and her future child) or surrounded by the children (so she makes a negative role model).

Example. Every milliliter of alcohol damages a part of ovicells, thus leaving a little a chance of having healthy children! Ovicells are not renewable!

Subslot 2. Smoking/drinking father

Dealing with the image of smoking/drinking father, I found a frequent analogy "Sober father means a happy family". It emphasizes the fact that the father is **responsible** for his closest ones; he is also a role model.

Slot 3. Family violence

The next topic under analysis is a continuation of the previous one. I mean family violence, especially when the objects of violence are women and children. The key components are **violence, outrage, injustice**.

Subslot 1. Violence against women

Example. Report the threat of violence before you become a part of someone's death. The witness of the family violence becomes an accomplice.

Subslot 2. Violence against children

The issue of violence against women is accompanied by the issue of violence against children. This problem is also acute, PSA texts focus upon it more and more often, because children are **more vulnerable and cannot defend themselves**.

Slot 4. Children's health

PSA texts also pay great attention to the problems of handicapped children, or children who need to undergo very expensive treatment. Very often, the parents of these children cannot afford to solve this problem alone. The key components of the slot are **convalescence, hope, help, chance**.

Slot 5. Orphans

Orphanage is a social phenomenon, when there are children who were left by their parents, whose parents died or were deprived of their parental rights, etc.

Many PSA texts, dealing with this issue, are aimed at a desire to adopt children. This slot's target is to evoke feelings of mercy and compassion, to form an attitude that **the adopted child can become an own one**.

Example. The poster "There are no alien children" (the orphan is drawing a family).

4. Conclusions

Conceptual analysis let us come to the following conclusions.

1. There is a great difference between semantic content of the concept of *family*, reconstructed on the bases of PSA texts, and the concept of *family*, existing in the consciousness of the native-speaker. This happens because concept in advertising has not only real aspect, but also a mythological one. They influence the recipient in a binary way – as concepts of the society and as mythologemes. Mythological part of the family in PSA discourse is connected with concepts of love, care, tenderness on the one hand, and with concepts of fear, stress and pain on the other; this is the result of the person's refusal to follow the rules, formulated by the society.

2. Comparison of major components of the concept of family, existing in the consciousness of the native-speaker, and components of the concept of family, reconstructed by PSA analysis, lets us see that prevailing signs of concept of family in PSA texts are negative: loneliness, fear, disease, etc. This preferential use of the concept

of family's components can be explained taking into consideration specificity of the advertising text: it is a pragmatically oriented manipulative text, which aims at a maximum impact on the recipient.

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