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Mit einem einleitenden Beitrag
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Media text as an object of linguistic examination

Is a journalist responsible for a reader's text interpretation?

Speaking publicly is “a big and honourable risk” (Rosenstock-Huessy 1994, p. 49), especially if it concerns media speech in which almost every “sign can be incorrectly interpreted; a sign can serve as a means of deception” (ibid., p. 50). Thus every media text containing any statements concerning some person or organization can, in principle, be impugned (Simonova/Gorbanevsky (eds.) 2004, p. 60f.), even if a journalist observes all safety precautions and consciously avoids “zones of risk”.

A linguistics expert considers such questions as for example ‘Is there implicit information about ... that is verbally or communicatively open for the audience in the text or video?’ or ‘Does the general speech strategy of the text imply ...?’ The purpose of such questions is to analyse the implicit semantics of a media text.

So, is a journalist responsible for implicit information or, in other words, for a reader's interpretation of a text? Does “косвенность «развязывает руки» автору высказывания, позволяя ему, если это понадобится, сказать, что он имел в виду только буквальный смысл сказанного” (“an implicit meaning really ‘untie the author's hands’ enabling them to say that they mean the statement literally”) (Kobozeva 2003, p. 100)? To answer this question, it is essential to differentiate between various types of implicit information, taking into account the data of our own and other linguists' examinations.

It is well known that the three components of a communicative-pragmatic chain are an **author**, a **text**, and an **addressee**. Thus, implicit information can be linked with an author's intention, with the nature of a text itself, and finally, with the peculiarities of an addressee.

As for an **author (journalist)**, his communicative intention always involves estimation. Even when a journalist simply states the events, he/she selects them according to his/her opinion, his/her attitude towards the facts and the people mentioned in the text.

We can recollect Bakhtin's statement that an author can never “отдать себя и все свое речевое произведение на полную и окончательную волю [...] адресатам” (“give himself and his speech composition to the complete and final

will [...] of addressees”) (Bakhtin 1979, p. 306), and speak about different historically formed ways of expressing one's opinion. In pre-perestroika media an author usually stated an official viewpoint, while in a current media text, a critical one in particular, an author stresses his/her own approach and gives his/her own estimation of a fact or a person (Solganik 2001; Smetanina 2002, p. 254f.).

One of the methods of bringing implicit information into mass media is a journalist's attempt to hide him/herself under the character's masque – the strategy of demonstrative self-removing and of delegating the authority to interpret the text to a reader. This method was used in some newspaper articles that were taken for linguistic examination. The author stated the events quite logically and estimated them from the perspective of “an Omsk-dweller M.” who was indignant, quoted another person's speech (notary N.'s), stated that she was deceived, that she was involved in the unconscionable bargain, etc. Let me list several examples to show how the character's position is revealed:

- *Rendering of the character's perception of the situation*: “N. вселила в М. Уверенность” (N. assured M.), “каково же было удивление М.” (M. was amazed by the fact that ...), “ответы ... деморализовали М.” (the answers ... demoralized M.);
- *The character's estimation of the situation*: “заподозрив неладное, М. ...” (having suspected something abnormal, M. ...), “супруг М. ... не стал прятаться и юлить” (M.'s husband ... didn't hide and wriggle), “циничное поведение бывшей приятельницы” (cynical behaviour of a former friend), “супруги М. старались уговорить нотариуса не поступать так непорядочно” (Mr. and Mrs. M. tried to persuade the notary not to act so dishonestly), etc.
- *The character's description of the situation*: “так описывает М. ситуацию в одном из своих заявлений в Главное управление областной Федеральной регистрационной службы” (this is the way M. describes the situation in one of her applications to the regional branch of the Central Administration of the Federal Registration Service), “нотариус убедила М., что данная операция осуществляется ею «единственно в целях обеспечения долга»” (the notary convinced M. that this operation is carried out “only for the purpose of doing her duty”);
- *The direct quotation and reproduction of the character's “inner speech”*: “А как же иначе могло быть, сама себя риторически вопрошает до сих пор М.? Ведь нотариус – это человек, которому люди доверяют самое сокровенное. ... Разве есть основания усомниться в моральном облике человека, в течение многих лет занимающего столь ответственную

должность?!“ (And how can it be another way, is M. still questioning herself rhetorically? Isn't the notary a person whom people entrust their innermost things? ... Are there any reasons for questioning the moral values of the person who holds this major post?!); “Это ведь что получается? ... Ведь они пришли к N. не только потому, что она их знакомая, но и потому что она – нотариус – «кристально честный и справедливый человек»“ (What a queer story! ... Why, but they came to N. not only because she is their friend but also because she – being a notary – “has the reputation for being morally honest and fair”), etc.

It would seem that the given fragments show that it was M. (but not the journalist) who describes the events, comments on them and estimates the actions and personality of notary N. However in our view, the author's position cannot but show itself in the text – otherwise we deal with a communicative failure: the text does not achieve a perlocutionary effect. Therefore every text has speech markers demonstrating correlation (in this particular case – coincidence) of the author's and the character's positions: irony that implies negative estimation (“Впрочем, будем объективны, N однажды сооблаговостила пойти навстречу M.” / But let's have an open mind, once N. was kind enough to meet with M.), attitudinal presupposition (“Могут ли люди сегодня доверять такому нотариусу? А не захотят ли и другие так же безнаказанно воспользоваться ситуацией, чужим горем и нажиться??” / Can people trust such a notary these days? Would the others also like to take advantage of the situation and make money out of another person's trouble??), direct statements (“То, что в этом процессе не должна была участвовать действующий нотариус – это непреложная истина.” / The gospel truth here is that the acting notary shouldn't have participated in this litigation.), etc.

Thus, the journalist's intention that determines the communicative strategy of the text is the reason for the readers' implications (the development of the text ideas). That is why the “play with linguistic double meaning” can hardly justify a journalist in a judicial examination.

Let us have a look at a well-known example cited by Levontina (2005). In a TV program about Mr. Y. Luzhkov, Moscow's mayor, Mr. S. Dorenko, a TV-journalist, said that he, Dorenko, “уцемил ему (Лужкову) достоинство” (in fact, this Russian phrase can be translated as both ‘wounded Luzhkov's dignity’ and ‘broke Luzhkov's balls’). So in Russian the phrase sounded obscene, and this was indicated by Ms. G. Krylova, Mr. Luzhkov's lawyer. In the programs that followed Mr. Dorenko tried to create an impression that Ms. Krylova regarded things as obscene that were, in fact, not. He stated that the word “достоинство” (‘dignity’ and the slang word for ‘male genital organs’) in re-

spect to Luzhkov is understood by her only in the obscene way. It was once again made in an abusive and indecent form: „Адвокат Лужкова настаивала не менее двух раз, что слово ‘достоинство’ в применении к мэру Москвы не может означать моральные качества. В применении к мэру слово ‘достоинство’, по-видимому, означает такую разновидность какого-то непотребства, о котором адвокат мэра знает, видела даже, но никому не скажет“ (Luzhkov's lawyer insisted several times that the word ‘достоинство’ in reference to Mr. Luzhkov cannot mean moral qualities. With reference to Mr. Luzhkov, the word seems to mean the kind of obscenity that the mayor's lawyer is aware of, and has even seen, but will not tell anybody about).

Meanwhile linguistic examination states that in the phrase “ущемил ему достоинство” Dorenko used the form in the dative case “ему” (him). In Russian one cannot say, for example, “задел ему честь” (hurt him feelings), “уязвил ему самолюбие” (offended him pride), (here “его” (his) instead of “ему” (him) must be used), but one says “оцарапал ему щеку” (scratched his cheek), “прищемил ему палец” (nipped his finger). That is why the phrase “ущемил ему достоинство” implies a part of the body. As the word “достоинство” in Russian has a colloquial meaning “male genital organ”, this very meaning is the implicit one which was planned by Dorenko in his speech. This meaning is set by the author and logically resulted from the laws of meaning formation. It is not an individual interpretation determined by the peculiarity of a reader, as Mr. Dorenko tried to show.

I suppose that in some cases a perlocutionary effect can be unexpected for a journalist. In one of her speeches T.V. Shmeleva cited the following example: in a newspaper article about a traffic accident involving a well-known person in the town, the author used the phrase “виновник события” (the culprit of the accident). This very phrase became the cause of the suit to defend his honour and dignity. Let us note that the person mentioned turned out to be not guilty in the traffic accident. The journalist and the linguistics expert failed to agree with the claim saying that in Russian the word “виновник” (culprit) has not only the meaning ‘someone who is guilty’, but also ‘someone who is a source and cause of something’ (“виновник торжества” / hero of the day). Meanwhile, in our view, ‘someone who is guilty’ is the initial main meaning of the word (according to psycholinguistics, it is the first thing that springs to mind, as well as the first and the most frequent response to the stimulus). Secondly, the given ambiguity is the natural implication that is carried out by a reader, and if it is not planned by an author, he/she is to be blamed for the vocational and linguistic incompetence.

We can hardly agree with Baranov who states that the essential information, though not explicitly verbalized, cannot be considered as proof of an author's intention of media texts linguistic examination (Baranov 2007, p. 46). Baranov mentions the handcuffs and prison clothes depicted together with Boris Jelzin's presidential election campaign message "Голосуй или проиграешь!" (Vote or you'll lose!). He writes: „[...] необязательно имелось в виду реальное тюремное заключение. Это можно было интерпретировать и как ограничение гражданских свобод, и как полицейское государство, и как обобщенно (даже символически) передаваемую идею опасности“ ([...] a real imprisonment may not have been meant here. It can be interpreted as civil liberties restriction, as police government or as a general (or symbolic) idea of danger) (ibid., p. 45). We consider that the first (the main) meaning of a word, characterized by denotation ambiguity, is the obligatory component in an addressee's interpretation of a message, in particular of the message addressed to mass audience.

We have reviewed the examples where implicit information is a part of an author's communicative strategy: an author plans "a corridor of understanding" (N.D. Arutyunova) of a separate statement or a text as a whole. At the same time implicit information can be connected with **objective laws of text formation**. Speaking about the laws of text formation, I first refer to the text categories of *integrity* and *coherence*. The first one presumes the unity of the theme of interconnected sentences that is provided by the reference identity, i.e., correlation with the same object of representation. The latter states both explicit (cohesion) and implicit (coherence) modes of link.

So, in a TV program broadcast by a TV company in Krasnoyarski Krai a journalist says: "Так это или нет, нам мог объяснить лишь руководитель управления образования N, но он наотрез отказался с нами сотрудничать" (The only person to explain whether it is so or not was N., the head of the Education Authority, but he refused categorically to cooperate with us). The next shot showed a person protecting himself from a video camera objective and mumbling words. The journalist goes on: "Как видно из сюжета, теперь руководитель управления не хочет давать нам комментарий, а если и согласится дать, то, как он сам заявил, только при одном условии – если лично отсмотрит сюжет перед выходом в эфир. Хочу обратиться ко всем работникам администрации: ставить такие условия нам не нужно, ведь тем самым вы нарушаете закон «О средствах массовой информации» и пытаетесь осуществить цензуру, а в силу закона «О средствах массовой информации», статьи 3, это запрещено. Так что не нарушайте закон." (As you can see, the head of the Education Authority doesn't want to give us any

comments, and even if he agrees, he will do it, as he has declared, only in one case – if he reviews the program before being broadcast. I want to call on all the Education Authority officials: you shouldn't impose conditions like that thereby violating the law on mass media and trying to practice censorship, but it is a violation of Article 3 of the law on mass media. So don't do it). The expert was to confirm or to contradict the fact that the last fragment of the text refers to N., the head of the Education Authority, who appeared at the beginning of the program, as well as that the meaning of the last phrase can not be understood without the meaning of the previous one and that it is determined by the communicative strategy of the text.

Let us review a linguistics expert's reasoning. In the analyzed fragment both evident and hidden modes of statement interconnection are given. Evident modes include the anaphoric demonstrative pronoun “такой” (*such*). In other words, in the text the word-combination “такие (условия)” (*such (conditions)*) should be understood by a recipient (a reader, a TV viewer) as “такие, как были описаны выше – такие, как поставил N.” (*such as stated above – such as were stated by N.*). The statements connection also demonstrates the unity of the addressee (“нам”/us): “не хочет давать нам (редакции – Н.К) интервью” (*doesn't want to give us [the wording of N.K.] an interview*) and “ставить такие условия нам не нужно” (*you shouldn't impose conditions on us*).

A formal addressee of the second phrase “Хочу обратиться ко всем работникам администрации ...” (*I want to call on all the Education Authority officials ...*) is all the officials of the Education Authority. However, let us examine dictionary and context semantics of the word “все” (*all*). It is one of the universal (*generalizing*) pronouns related to all objects of a certain class. Is the subject N included in this class? Obviously so, as he is the head of the Education Authority – an administrative office.

Further proof of the unity of the subjects in the first and the second statement is that they are linked with textual and logical inclusion relations; one and the same event (situation) is described with the help of the means of wide and narrow meaning. In Gak's view, „последующее обобщение ситуации служит средством подчеркивания, выражения категоричности. Говорящий стремится таким образом показать, что данный факт является частным случаем более общего факта“ ([...] *the succeeding generalization of a situation serves as a means for emphasizing and stating categorically. A speaker aims to show that the given fact is a special case of a more general fact*) (Gak 1979, p. 98). Moreover, when the meaning of this generalized situation is ex-

changed for a wider one, the generalized situation enables us to realize how the speaker estimates it and his/her attitude towards the event. Besides, it allows us to emphasize imperativity as well.

Exactly this type of sentence connection is used in the text presented for linguistic examination. So, the two analysed phrases are connected with each other grammatically, logically and semantically. Taken in isolation, the second phrase can be understood as a general statement, but in the context of the TV program the understanding of its meaning depends on the meaning of the first one.

It should be considered that the phrases are said and heard simultaneously with the video sequence reflecting one theme: the necessity of making children's preschool institutions municipal again and the absence of such activity on the regional authorities' part. The video camera records the nursery schools reequipped for other institutions, shows the sign "Education Authority" on the building of a former nursery school and the journalist's attempt to interview N. The phrase "Хочу обратиться ко всем работникам администрации ..." (I want to call on all the Education Authority officials ...) ends the program, giving the overall results. Therefore, perceiving the journalist's speech simultaneously with the video-image, a TV viewer interprets it as a condemnation of the local authorities' actions and N., in particular, being responsible for the situation and refusing to co-operate with the journalist. It is he who was blamed by the journalist for the violation of the law on censorship. This is the obligatory meaning of the interpretation planned by the journalist – all the rest are optional and beyond the scope of his responsibility.

The hidden meanings based on discourse implicatures are determined by the laws of pragmatics. Let me point out that, according to Kobozeva, discourse implicatures are inferences drawn by an addressee who takes Gricean conversational maxims into consideration (Kobozeva 2003, p. 124).

One of the most widespread implication of media discourse is a rhetorical question actualizing **the maxim of manner**: a statement should be clear, unambiguous, brief, and coherent. According to the rhetoric laws, such a question is asked not to receive information as an answer, but to state a fact or to give an opinion, so such a statement is a clear and unambiguous affirmative one.

A rhetorical question is quite often used as a title of the articles presented for linguistic examination on defence of honour, dignity and business reputation. For example, the title of the article "Можно ли доверять нотариусу?" (Can the notary be trusted?) includes the hidden statement: "Нотариусу (такому,

который описан в статье) доверять невозможно” (It is impossible to trust the notary (depicted in the article)). The title in one of Omsk newspapers “Треть качества за полную цену?” (Is a third of the quality for the overall price?) only masks an affirmative sentence.

The maxim of quality (do not say what you believe to be false and do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence) is violated, in our view, in the following text fragment.

“По словам г-на N., на сегодняшний день уже выпущено десять групп по восемь человек. То есть на омских дорогах появилось 80 обученных по известной методике водителей. Однако пообщаться хотя бы с одним выпускником нам не удалось: в школе эту информацию назвали конфиденциальной (между тем в столичных автошколах дальнейшая автобиография выпускников таких школ отслеживается для статистики). Таким образом, все претензии на столичный уровень заканчиваются ... наличием столичных сертификатов, а получение лицензии – всего лишь вопрос денег, а не качества услуг ...” (Mr. N. reports that 10 groups of 8 people have graduated from a driving school. In other words, Omsk witnesses 80 drivers who were taught according to popular methods. However, we were not able to talk to even one of the graduates: at the school we were told that this information is confidential (while in the capital's driving schools a further biography of graduates of such schools is monitored for statistics. Thus, all pretences of having the capital's level are finished ... with distribution of the capital's certificates, and obtaining the licence is only the question of money but not of service quality ...)

The statements that this Omsk driving school (unlike the ones in Moscow) regards the information about its graduates as confidential are not an adequate reason to make a conclusion about the level of teaching or a way of obtaining the licence. The information given in the text can be an adequate reason only to complain of the lack of statistics and information about the life of Omsk driving schools graduates after their time there and to advise driving schools to keep such records, etc.

The same maxim of quality (as well as the logical law of sufficient reason) is violated in the following phrase: “В Омске это уже третья подобная автошкола, однако ни одна из них не обеспечивает полноценного обучения, тогда как *стоимость курсов приближается к уровню столичных.*” (It is the third similar driving school in Omsk, but none of them gives adequate teaching, while *the price of the courses is approximately the same as in the capital.*) To make this statement (italics by N.K.) reasonable, an average price

for similar courses in Moscow must be mentioned. This example also demonstrates the appeal to a reader's background knowledge: in the context of the analyzed article (and all in all – in “naïve conscience” of a modern native speaker) the semantics of the word “столичный” (capital) is understood as ‘дорогой’ (expensive) – this is the natural addressee's implication which cannot but be taken into consideration by the journalist.

At last, implicit information can be connected to **cognitive-personal conditions of text perception**, in particular to the specific features of a mass media user's cognitive base. However, in this case various types of competence must be distinguished: common (national, cultural) and individual. The understanding of the word “столичный” (capital) as “дорогой” (expensive) can be classified as the national part of cognitive competence (cf. the contrast of “the capital” and “the provinces” often used in humorous genre). The implicit meaning of the following example is based on the fund of common knowledge of regional community members. “Listok” (a Gorno-Altai newspaper, 2003) published the following text under the title “Почему они такие наглые ...” (Why are they so impudent ...): “Потому что их «крышуют». На самом вер-ху сидит благообразный дедушка, издали напоминающий местечкового бога, ну, или, на худой конец, хана. Он не дает своих в обиду. Он позволяет им нарушать закон.” (Because they are under “a protection racket”. The top is occupied by a comely old man resembling a parochial God or at least a khan. He doesn't let his people be hurt. He permits them to violate the law).

The expert's conclusion that the text speaks about the head of the Republic of Altai was based not only on the semantics of the expression “на самом вер-ху” (the top is occupied), but also on the readers' background knowledge that the post was occupied by M.I. Lapshin (Doronina 2004).

On the other hand, it is known that a text can ‘give’ the implicit meanings that correlate with the reader's own mental attitude, that is why there are a lot of judicial inquiries concerning variations of individual interpretation (for example, the interpretation of the word “коммунист” (communist) as an invective in the 1990s). One actor sued a journalist and a newspaper for being called “малоизвестным актером” (an *obscure* actor) that he considered abusive.

Another example of the same type: some texts used for a deputy's election campaign were sent for linguistic examination, in particular it was necessary to determine if the phrase “Достойно ли Безропотно терпеть позор судьбы? Иль надо оказать сопротивление? Восстать, вооружиться, победить? ... (Шекспир)” (*Whether 'tis noble in the mind to suffer The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to take arms against a sea of troubles And,*

by opposing, end them ... (Shakespeare)) contains signs of extremism. Answering the question, the expert used such notions as “norm of perception, speech culture, cultural (intertextual) thesaurus” (Golev 2007).

Let us come to a conclusion. Implicit meanings can appear in accordance with a text nature, its structural, semantic, pragmatic components, or can be connected to the personality of a text recipient, his cognitive base (common and individual-personal components). Only in the last case is a journalist not to be accused. If implicit meanings go by the text laws, the statements that manipulative methods “untie an author's hands” are false and cannot free a journalist from responsibility for the authenticity of information – both evident and implicit. In conclusion, allow me to remark that the problem is not as simple as it seems: at least in three of the cases mentioned in this article linguistics experts were of different opinions.

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