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Research article

The precedent context of Russian mass media discourse

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Abstract. The role of precedent phenomena in the media space, in the processes of text generation and meaning formation of the media text is studied. Today, the media are modeling the reality. It may differ from the reality as it is, which is not reflected, but presented through diverse interpretations. In interpreting a statement/message, a significant role belongs to precedent phenomena and the underlying knowledge structures. The problems of the media text, a socially significant communicative environment of our time, determined the relevance of the research. The purpose of the study is to characterize the role of precedent units in interpreting the media text (at the level of meaning and significance). The materials of the research are Russian newspapers, the Newspaper Corpus of the Russian Language, the National Corpus of the Russian Language, and internet sources in Russian. The authors used methods of the discursive level, discourse analysis of precedent phenomena, taking into account their extralinguistic dimension; the cognitive projection of the study assumed linguo-cognitive analysis and linguo-cognitive modeling as modeling the structure of meaning, text formation and sense formation based on precedent units. The study provides a discourse analysis of precedent phenomena taking into account their extralinguistic dimension and a linguocognitive analysis in order to model additional meanings and the structure of the meaning of precedent units. The cognitive approach identified the role of extralinguistic knowledge in forming the meaning of the text and the precedent unit. Thematized (invariant) knowledge shared by communicants is the key to the successful interpretation of the precedent unit and the functional effectiveness of the media text. Prospects: in the future, it seems promising to study the corpus of precedent units relevant to professional and citizen journalism, their structure, differences, spheres of functioning, as well as modeling the meaning of precedent units in social networks, memes, and the blogosphere.

Keywords: media text, precedent phenomena, extralinguistic knowledge, thematized knowledge, cognitive structures of knowledge representation

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Introduction

Today the media are actively creating a specific media picture of the world, a new media reality in which the world is not displayed but interpreted. For the linguistic study of media the term “media text” has been introduced. Combining verbal and media units, media text as a generic term combines such concepts as newspaper article, TV and radio text, Internet advertising and other types of media products (Dobrosklonskaya, 2008).

It should be noted that all forms of communication are moving into the media form, and today media are competing with social networks, information portals, blogosphere, etc. (Mityagina, 2012).

The media-text is associated with its new formats: modern media is the multi-media content of online publications and online versions of print media. Media-text is expanded with the possibility of discussion (initial media text and accompanying comments), with users producing and sharing information themselves – the so-called citizen journalism (Karasik, 2019; Lisenkova, 2018; Polonsky, 2019).

Precedent phenomena/units representing the cultural values of the nation are important in the media text as a product of the media.

The relevance of the research is due to the role of the media in modern society and the importance of studying precedent phenomena in the media space.

In domestic linguistics, precedent phenomena are studied within the framework of precedence theory (Zakharenko et al., 1997; Krasnykh, 2003; Kushneruk, 2006; Vorozhtsova, 2007; Nakhimova, 2011; Panarina, 2017; Moiseenko, 2021); intertextuality theory (Denisova, 2003; Olizko, 2009; Kuzmina, 2011); intercultural communication (Gudkov, 2003); linguoculturalism (Slyshkin, 2004).

The relevant phenomena are presented in the works of Spanish and Latin American scientists. Their research is connected with the theory of intertextuality and interdiscursiveness (Aguirre Romero, 2001; Rojo, 2008; Sánchez Vega, 2009); intercultural communication (Luque Durán, 2009); the study of discursive strategies (Casado Velarde, 2008). At the same time, the object of our research is usually called “culturema” (Rodríguez, Mora, 2002; Molina Martínez, 2006). The concept of “precedent phenomenon” is found only in the article by Ukrainian and Spanish researchers (Vyshnya, Sevilla Muñoz, 2007), which, undoubtedly, is under the influence of Yu.N. Karaulov as the founder of the precedence theory (Karaulov, 1986) in linguistics.

The aim of the present study is to show, with the help of the simulated cognitive mechanism of interpretation, that the precedent units in the media text, being address-oriented secondary structures, participate in the processes of text formation, formation of lexical meaning and creation of additional meanings.

Methods and materials

The methods at the discourse level include discourse analysis of the precedent phenomena in the media discourse in the extra-linguistic dimension.

The cognitive projection of the research predetermined the application of linguocognitive analysis and linguocognitive modeling – modeling the structure of meaning, text formation and semantic formation on the basis of precedent units.

The materials from the Russian Newspaper Corpus, the National Russian Language Corpus,¹ the newspapers *Izvestia*, *Kommersant*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, *Novaya Gazeta*, the online media *lenta.ru* and other Internet sources (social networks, blogs) in Russian were used in this work.

Results

In the course of this research we arrived at the following results.

Media text, as a media product, is not only a space of actualization of precedent phenomena, but also an active generator of new precedent units.

Media intertext has its own peculiarities in the binary relationship “author – reader”. The role of the reader in a medial intertext is smaller than in a fictional intertext and excludes numerous reader’s interpretations. Media intertext is auto-centric and fully subordinated to the author’s (journalist’s) tasks of creating a media reality which reflects the author’s position.

By using precedent units, the author of a media text creates a cognitive space with shared knowledge with the reader. This shared knowledge is aimed at bringing the author closer to the reader.

The notion of recurrence applies to precedent phenomena in two forms. It refers to the secondary nature of linguistic representation: every precedent unit is secondary, as it relates to its precedent in the primary use. On the other hand, precedent units have the capacity for secondary semiosis and the formation of new meanings.

The cognitive structures underlying precedent phenomena combine linguistic and extra-linguistic features. They serve as a tool for creating the structure of a media text, generating additional meanings and forming the lexical meaning of a precedent unit.

The cognitive mechanism for interpreting precedent phenomena that we have developed is based on extralinguistic knowledge, which the media text contains in an implicit form.

Discussion

Scientific achievements in the study of precedent phenomena. So far, the main achievements in the research of precedent phenomena can be summarized in the following areas of scientific knowledge.

1. The *notion* of a precedent text was defined, and a *demarkation of the precedent space*, including any kind of “alien words” (names of works of fiction, movies, names of authors, literary and historical characters, aphorisms, etc.), was carried out.

2. The *taxonomy* of precedent phenomena has been presented. We distinguish a *level* typology of precedential phenomena (auto-precedential, socio-precedential, national-precedential and universal-precedential phenomena) and a *generic* typology classifying precedential phenomena according to their typological characteristics (precedent text, precedent utterance, precedent situation, precedent name (Gudkov, 2003; Krasnykh, 2003)).

¹The National Corpus of the Russian language. Retrieved April 5, 2021, from <https://ruscorpora.ru/new/index.html>

The sources of precedent phenomena (artistic texts, movies, songs, political discourse, journalism, advertising) were studied. The productivity of the sources and their correspondence to certain historical periods were determined. The dynamics of the sphere-sources are defined as follows: statements of the founders of Marxism-Leninism and the leaders of the Party in the Soviet era (Krongauz, 2008) → classical literature (the literary-centric characteristic of Russian communicative behavior is noted – Denisova, 2003; Vorozhtsova, 2007) → film quotes → advertising (*Are you still boiling? Then we're coming to you!*, Tide, cf. condemning U.S. foreign policy with a slogan from a Russian commercial *Do you still not believe in democracy? Then we are flying to you*) → sayings of contemporary Russian politicians (*We will all work fruitfully, and it will never end*²).

The degree of phenomena precedence according to their durability is determined, with the selection of strong (popular) and weak (going to be forgotten) texts. Strong texts are considered to be the works of classical Russian literature of the 19th century (Kuzmina, 2011). Nuclear texts (Denisova, 2003), which have a timeless character, are also singled out. They refer to the educational canon (Pushkin, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky) and are formed in the school curriculum. Precedent phenomena reflecting the traditional values of the society are “attacked” in order to modify the cultural paradigm (Gudkov, 2003) during the fluctuations of the socio-economic system (for example, during the collapse of the USSR). The opposite phenomenon – nostalgia for bygone cultural values – has also been noted. They are romanticised in unstable crisis periods with the help of retro-technologies (Lindstrom, 2012). Thus, precedent phenomena play an essential role in the nostalgic movement for the Soviet time (the song *I was born in the Soviet Union, I was made in the USSR*; the names of restaurants *Specbufet No 7, Sluzhebnyj vhod, Polevaja kuhnja, Zhiguli*, etc.).

5. A number of studies are devoted to the *recognition* of precedent phenomena in communication, incorrect attributability of quotations from classical texts (Boyarskikh, 2007; Elistratov, 2000; Kuzmina, 2011). The works note that the younger generation often does not understand the quotations used by journalists, which indicates changes in the structure of the precedent field and modifications of the national cultural code.

In this paper, the object of the study comprises precedent units in the media text, and the subject of the study is the role of cognition in their interpretation.

Precedent units functioning in the media text. We understand a precedent phenomenon (Moiseenko, 2021) as a recurrent fragment of any discourse (fiction, journalism, advertising, etc.), which is fixed in the consciousness of the linguistic personality and functions in the discourse as a cultural sign in accordance with the speaker’s intentions.

Modern media text is characterized by intertextuality, understood as the inclusion of one text into another. Intertext functions as a polylogue of the author, the reader and the text itself (Ivanova, 2005), as a semiotic mechanism, with a person interacting with the text as its element (Lotman, 2002). Whereas fiction intertext combines the “author” – “reader” positions and is open for numerous interpretations (Lotman, 2002), media intertext is conditioned by the pragmatic in-

² Mironov S. Retrieved April 5, 2021, from <https://www.aphorism.ru/comments/qjeieq49ey.html>

tention of the author and allows only those interpretations which reflect the author's position. The autocentric nature of the media text is aimed at the author's creation of a media reality, which may differ significantly from reality as it is.

The modern mass media discourse is characterized by mixture of informational and artistic discourses, hybridization (combination of different discursive genres). At the same time, the information content is reduced, and the non-factual context is more interesting than the information itself. The actualization of a precedent unit in a media text is always an expression against the background of neutral linguistic means.

The secondary nature of linguistic representation is a constitutive feature of a precedent unit, which relates to its precedent as the first instance of its use, i.e. the secondary nature of a precedent unit is related to its recurrence.

With respect to precedent units, we also distinguish secondary semiosis, i.e. the formation of a new meaning, not foreseen by the linguistic system. For example, *Pushkin is the great Russian poet* contains *Pushkin* as a precedent name (in its denotative meaning), characterized by the secondary nature of its linguistic representation. And here is the same precedent name in the sentence: *Who will pay, Pushkin?* (Elistratov, 2000: 8), where the precedent name *Pushkin* receives a new meaning – someone unknown; God knows who (non-referential meaning), which allows to refer the phenomenon to secondary semiosis.

Media text as a source sphere of precedent units. Russian journalism is considered to be precedential (Elistratov, 2010), because of journalists' passion for quoting and playing with quotations. At the same time, the media not only use known precedent phenomena, but also generate new ones. The events in Ukraine in 2014 proved to be particularly fruitful for precedents. The precedent unit *Crimea is ours*; and the hashtag *#krymnash* became the main word of 2014, with 109 entries in the Newspaper Corpus of the Russian language:³

And the main question, in refrain: "Misha, tell me, just as a matter of fact, *Crimea is ours?*"⁴

The Crimean spring enriched the Russian language with such precedents as *nyash-myash* (the song "Ah, what a *nyasha* prosecutor Natasha"), *polite people* (Timofeev, 2018) – 102 entries in the Newspaper Corpus of the Russian language, For example:

...The State Duma deputy Natalia Poklonskaya spoke. If by that time someone continued to see the parliamentarian as a beautiful "*Nyash-myash*," the conflict with the film industry dotted the i.⁵

The first such store opened in May 2016 in Moscow on the Garden Ring Road opposite the U.S. Embassy. The assortment includes several clothing lines under the brands "Russian Army" and "*Polite People*".⁶

Jennifer Rene Psaki, the spokesperson for the United States Department of State, has become almost the most mythologized character in the Russian media

³ The Newspaper Corpus of the Russian language. Retrieved April 5, 2021, from <https://ruscorpora.ru/new/search-paper.html>

⁴ Novaya Gazeta. 2016.05.04.

⁵ Lenta.ru. 2017.12.18.

⁶ Lenta.ru. 2017.06.15.

since the first days of the Ukrainian crisis. Her last name has become synonymous with “nonsense,” and the Russian language has been enriched by the terms “psaking,” “psaka,” and “psaki-level people”:

...*psaking* started in February, when relations between Moscow and Washington deteriorated because of Kiev.⁷

Social media were overflowed with jokes like: an American fence inscription: “Beware of angry *psaka!*”⁸

The phrase that the U.S. Sixth Fleet would be immediately deployed to the coast of Belarus in case of Ukraine invasion shows that Ms. Psaki has little knowledge of geography (Belarus has no access to the sea).⁹

Social media reacted to this case (Figure 1), as well as to J. Psaki’s maternity leave (Figure 2) with Internet memes:¹⁰ How we’re going to miss her! Bring her back, we’re bored! :) #SavePsaki #lovePsaki #needPsaki #SavePsaki pic.twitter.com/XV9GvbkDTv

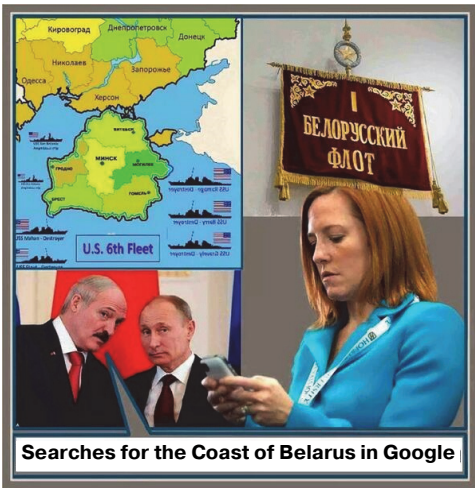


Figure 1. How social networks reacted to J. Psaki’s knowledge of geography¹¹



Figure 2. How social networks reacted to J. Psaki’s maternity leave

Some of the precedent units have a high index of representation in the Russian media. Thus, according to the Newspaper Corpus of the Russian language, “*We wanted as best, but it turned out as always*” has 222 entries; “*It pains me to see my country suffering!*” (words from the film “*The White Sun of the Desert*”) –

⁷ Komsomolskaya Pravda. 2014.07.03.

⁸ Jen Psaki considers herself a victim of “Russian propaganda” and believes that she was criticized for voicing Washington’s official position (Komsomolskaya Pravda. 2014.06.11). There is an opinion that the “Psaki phenomenon” was created specifically for information campaigns in order to avoid answering “uncomfortable” questions from the U.S. leadership (Sergeev, 2016).

⁹ The statement was not recorded. Nevertheless, Lukashenko’s press service perceived the threat accordingly: “If the U.S. Sixth Fleet approaches to the shores of Belarus, the 17th Belarusian Space Fleet will immediately attack Washington” (FB. 2015.10.04).

¹⁰ Retrieved April 5, 2021, from pic.twitter.com/k9tWAlcWn6; <https://mobile.twitter.com/SpiritOfRussia/status/474482478984753153/photo/1>; https://twitter.com/au_auk/status/474450247377485824

¹¹ Retrieved April 5, 2021, from <http://anek-worlds.ru/archives/9784>

90 entries. Much rarer – 10 entries – is represented by the precedent unit *Never had such a thing and here it is again* (V.S. Chernomyrdin). For example:

Read more about the consequences of the quarrel between the leaders of the U.S. and Canada in the Kommersant article “*It pains the Canadians to see their country suffering*”.¹²

“Our ‘classic’ Chernomyrdin used to say: ‘*We wanted as best, but it turned out as always.*’ There is no need to go too far, no need for this humiliating attitude towards people. I am against it,” Valentina Matvienko said.¹³

Never had such a thing and here it is again – in Russia a new line will appear there will be another line in the public utility bill.¹⁴

The set of precedent names differs in professional and citizen journalism, where, for example, the precedent names of the ubiquitous *Petrov* and *Bashirov* are now very relevant (Figure 3).



Figure 3. New precedent names: Petrov and Bashirov

As we see, modern media text serves not only as a sphere of actualization for the precedent phenomena that translate cultural values, but also as a powerful generator of new precedent units.

Text formation, semantic formation, formation of the lexical meaning of precedent units. The medial space of the intertext realizes the strategy of textuality, which is important for the linguistic and pragmatic organization of the media text, and which includes such processes as text formation and semantic formation. Text formation is formally expressed through actualization of precedent units in the *title complex*, *initial* and *final phrases* (strong positions).

Usually, the actualization of a precedent unit in the strong position is accompanied by a transformation (deconstruction) of the basic linguistic structure:

¹² Kommersant. 2018.06.16.

¹³ Kommersant. 2018.12.24.

¹⁴ Moskovsky Komsomolets. 2018.09.18.

Where nothing is, there is no loan; Crime and suspend sentence; Skating move; Love is gone... The mortgage remains; Wealth is not a vice; Taming the dollar; To drink or not to drink? etc. For example:

In general, all the Western media explain Russia's interest in Cyprus by vital and purely pragmatic reasons and motives. So, it turns out that Cyprus is worth a Russian "mass?" I remember that since the time of Henry of Navarre the words "Paris is worth a mass" mean the justification of a deal or a compromise for personal gain.¹⁵

The mechanism of deconstruction of a standard precedent unit (*Paris is worth a mass* → *Cyprus is worth a Russian "mass"*), creating intellectual tension, forms an expressive means of the media text.

Precedent units, which are based on secondary cognitive structures, are capable of creating additional meanings. For example:

Putin responded to the accusations of a chemical attack on Syria with the phrase "It's boring, girls."¹⁶

Vladimir Putin: Russia has information about provocations being prepared in Syria. I would like to say: "It's boring, girls – we've already seen it all, we've observed it all," said the president.¹⁷

The phrase from the novel "The Twelve Chairs" by I. Ilf and E. Petrov "*It's boring, girls*" creates a new meaning – already seen and heard. Cf. also the formation of additional meanings in the expression *State Department cookies*.

The State Department will forget about *cookies*.

The U.S. State Department is probably the most recognizable phrase in Russia... And "*State Department cookies*" has become an established expression... However, if we forget about the notorious "*cookies*", the strengthening of the Pentagon in spite of the State Department will hardly make the Russian authorities happy.¹⁸

The situation of Victoria Nuland handing out cookies to Maidan supporters (November 2013) can be characterized as precedent. The word *cookies*, considered in our context as a precedent unit, acquires a new meaning – American support and anti-Russian attacks.

Nuland is making new *cookies* for the revolution.

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's visit to the White House ended with a *cookie* treat from U.S. leader Joe Biden.¹⁹

Let us consider the peculiarities of the formation of the meaning structure on the example of a common precedent unit in the modern media – the universal precedent name *Cinderella*. In Russian, the following conceptual meanings can be distinguished in the *Cinderella* concept: *a girl of the people; she washes, cleans and rubs; she suddenly receives recognition and success; she loses her glass slipper*. For example:

The "Stavropol *Cinderella*" who lost her shoe at the parade was rewarded. As it turned out, the girl lost her shoe and kept marching in spite of the heavy rain.²⁰

¹⁵ Birjevoy Lider. 2013.03.27.

¹⁶ Lenta.ru. 2017.04.11.

¹⁷ Kommersant. 2017.04.11.

¹⁸ Rambler. 2017.08.01.

¹⁹ Narodnye Novosti. 2021.07.29.

Well, only in fairy-tales it is possible that everything changes in a moment, and *Cinderella* becomes a princess.²¹

Foreigners think that in Ukraine, as well as in Russia and Belarus, people live in poverty. They see our women as *Cinderellas* and feel themselves as princes.²²

The most frequent use of the precedent name *Cinderella* in the Russian press is associated with *sudden recognition and success*. For example:

“*Cinderella* from Nizhny Novgorod” Natalia Vodianova visited the “Good Ball” charity tournament.²³

Model from Yaroslavl marries Boris Yeltsin.

And now the Yaroslavl *Cinderella* lives in Los Angeles. As for the star groom, everyone knows about Boris’ predilection for girls with model appearance.²⁴

The precedent name *Cinderella* is presented in a different way in other cultures. For example, a new law in Great Britain, applied to parents for child abuse, was named *the Cinderella Law*,²⁵ in South Korea *the Cinderella Law* (or *Shutdown Law*) is directed against computer addiction of teenagers under 16 years old and introduces a ban on computer games from 23.30 till 6.00.²⁶ The *Cinderella* complex in America is referred to women’s fear of being independent, waiting for a prince who will change their lives (Dowling, 1981). For Hungarians (Zavyalova, 2007), *Cinderella* is a fairy-tale for children that will never come true. And only in Russian consciousness this fairy-tale story can happen to anyone.

As we can see, the same fairy-tale character (Charles Perrault/Brothers Grimm) receives different interpretations in different languages and cultures, which is explained by the specific cognitive structures attached to this precedent name in a particular society.

Conclusion

The conducted research complements the existing scientific achievements in the field of studying precedent phenomena, which concern the demarcation of the precedent field of the Russian linguistic personality, the taxonomy of precedent phenomena, their sources and productivity, the degree of precedence and attributability of precedent units.

The analyzed peculiarities of the media intertext and the cognitive perspective revealed the role of precedent units in the processes of text formation and creation of additional communicative meanings in the media text. The architectonics of the secondary semiosis as a process of creating the lexical meaning of the precedent unit, based on cognitive structures with access to extralinguistic knowledge, seems to be really important.

The study of the corpus and structure of precedent units in the media text created by both professional and citizen journalism seems promising in the future.

²⁰ Lenta.ru. 2017.05.11.

²¹ Sovetsky Sport. 2011.05.18.

²² Komsomolskaya Pravda. 2011.12.16.

²³ Komsomolskaya Pravda. 2013.08.29.

²⁴ Komsomolskaya Pravda. 2012.09.07.

²⁵ Russkoyazychnaya Velikobritania. 2014.04.01.

²⁶ ProGamer. 2011.11.24.

The precedent field, precedent units functioning, and the mechanism of meaning modeling should have their own specifics in citizen journalism, which covers social networks, the blogosphere, and Internet comments on the initial media text.

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Научная статья

Прецедентное пространство русского массмедийного дискурса

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Аннотация. Изучается роль прецедентных феноменов в организации медиального пространства, в процессах текстопорождения и смыслоформирования в медиатексте. Сегодня СМИ моделируют медиальную реальность. Она может отличаться от реальной действительности, которая не отображается, а представляется посредством многочисленных интерпретаций. В процессах интерпретации высказывания/сообщения значительное место занимают прецедентные феномены и лежащие в их основе структуры знания. Проблематика медиатекста, который является социально значимой коммуникативной средой современности, обусловила актуальность исследования. Цель исследования заключается в изучении роли прецедентных единиц в интерпретации медиатекста (на уровне смысла и значения). Анализировались материалы российских газет, Газетного корпуса русского языка, Национального корпуса русского языка, интернет-источников на рус-

ском языке. Использовались методики дискурсивного уровня, дискурс-анализ прецедентных феноменов с учетом экстралингвистического измерения; когнитивная проекция исследования предполагала лингвокогнитивный анализ и лингвокогнитивное моделирование как моделирование структуры значения, текстообразования и смыслоформирования на основе прецедентных единиц. Проведен дискурс-анализ прецедентных феноменов с учетом экстралингвистического измерения и лингвокогнитивный анализ с целью моделирования дополнительных смыслов и структуры значения прецедентных единиц. Когнитивный подход, примененный в работе, позволил выявить роль экстралингвистического знания в формировании смысла текста и значения прецедентной единицы. Тематизированное, разделяемое коммуникантами (инвариантное) знание является залогом успешной интерпретации прецедентной единицы и функциональной эффективности медиатекста. В дальнейшем представляется перспективным изучение корпуса прецедентных единиц, релевантных для профессиональной и гражданской журналистики, их структуры, отличий, сфер функционирования, а также моделирование значения прецедентных единиц в социальных сетях, мемах, блогосфере.

Ключевые слова: медиатекст, прецедентные феномены, экстралингвистическое знание, тематизированное знание, когнитивные структуры репрезентации знания, русский язык

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