Speech Algorithms in Advertising and Public Relations: Case Story as a Cognitive Structure

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Abstract

The paper concerns the question of genre qualification of the texts used in both advertising and public relations. Possible application of speech genre theory and intentional approach to the speech studies in the sphere of applied communications is considered. The authors concentrate on revealing the specificity of text types and studying speech algorithms in order to describe the cognitive structure of a particular genre. Typical speech structures of case stories used in advertising and public relations are examined. The article shows how the algorithms of speech activity are used in the context of professional speech activity, and how various meanings that are important for the particular discourse are implemented with the help of these algorithms.

Keywords: media text, public relations, advertising, genre, image, persuasion, speech algorithm, cognitive structure.
Introduction

The most important research tasks in modern communicative linguistics are to find diverse forms of textual reproductive activity as the optimal models of efficient speech interaction. The meaning and nature of the very activity is reflected in these speech models, its products - the texts, since the features of its peculiarity are established in each of the considered areas and communication situations. Medialinguistics focuses its attention on the studies of speech activity in the media environment actively developing both in Russia and abroad [Analysing media texts 2001; Bell 1998; Dobrosklonskaya 2014; Loewe 2013]. We have differentiated three professional types – journalistic, advertising and image-forming [Duskaeva 2015]. Professional speech of an area is determined by its style of genres, each specialty has its most important genres and specific laws of compositional and speech representation [Duskaeva 2016].

One cannot but note that despite the readiness of the question of genre qualification of advertising and PR-texts, the problem of compositional and speech representation of these texts remains open, as in most genre classifications, the compositional and speech aspects of the texts are not taken into account, whereas the most productive way to understand how language is used by professionals in a particular field of communication consists in describing the speech genres as thematic, compositional and stylistic unity [Dementiev 2010; Gayda 1993; Moesssnar 2001; Salimovsky 2002; Witosh 2005; Vojtak 2004; Corbett 2006]. The problem situation is worsened by the fact that the genres initially formed in one professional area can be used sometimes in another one. This comes about the case story: genre known in advertising, is also used in image-forming business in the field of public relations, at the same time its compositional and speech structure is transformed. But above all, let us dwell on the presentation of our approach to the analysis of speech genres.

Analysis Methods

There is no doubt that the central idea is to understand the speech genre as a text type [Vojtak, Gayda 1992; Salimovsky 2002]. This is quite natural: the speech activity is carried out in the text products and, only in the text, professional communication tasks can be achieved. These branches of psycholinguistics have shown that “the text governs the sentences” and man speaks “not by separate sentences but a composed text” [Zhinkin 1982: 85].

Psycholinguists emphasize that the sentences-utterances are combined into the text thanks to the author’s intention. So, the intention is the basis speech product. But the intention does not occur just in a finished form, it is gradually corrected under the influence of external non-linguistic circumstances of communication, in professional speech activity, primarily related to the performance of professional duties. It is appropriate to classify genres of works as the products of professional speech activity on the basis of the needed standard professional target sets. These target sets underlie the presentation of the author's intention which further being embodied in the text becomes the basis for the creation of the text product.

We treat the author's message as a set of intentions (intentionality), embodied into the composition of the text in the form of complex structural system of messages, communicative actions, among which there are main ones, “the others are additional, the third are complementary to the second, etc.” [Dridze 1984]. The author's intention determines the
composition of the text, which reflects “the structure, correlation and relative position of the parts” of speech product, “division into semantic elements, the degree and nature of expressiveness of these elements, their order and relationship between them” [Bazhenova 2003: 168]. So, the text composition is formed as a result of its development from the main idea by which the intention initially appears through a sequence of additional ones. According to the intention, there take place text form ordering, creation of the integrity of the composition structure and coherence in the composition.

The typical author's intention underlying the creation of speech genre is a part of the considered professional activity. We understand speech genre as a typological form of realization of professional target set in demand, and therefore, genre composition is the speech embodiment of sequences of speech acts (sub-genre and elementary), reconstructing the objective logic of goal achievement by a professional. The positioning order of these speech acts reproduces the way to achieve this or that genre target set. It means that in a media text as in any other one there not only the result is reflected but also the process of the affecting speech activity of the subject on achieving professional goals. This approach shows the way the mechanisms of information influence are expressed in composition and architectonic of the media texts and a specific speech activity is developed in speech units (actions, acts, sub-genres). The linguistic organization of speech genre is determined by the dynamics of its content-semantic structure.

With this approach, the scholar refers to compositional and speech units proper - speech acts which are expressed by means of task-oriented selection of language devices. As a result, the whole text as a unit of communication (!) is presented in its components - composites: communication steps, speech acts, speech genres, speech actions, the change of which reflects the sequence, algorithms of speech activities of a professional. And it is important to stress that the linguist cannot ignore the fact that the composites are created by the interaction of language means, which is provided by intentionality.

The applicability of our approach to the analysis of speech genres of advertising and PR-texts has been considered in several recent publications [Goryachev, 2015; Konyaeva 2014, Kornilova 2015:] at the same time, the conclusion about the appropriateness of differentiating three types of PR-texts has been made - phatic, informing and persuasive (the texts have been divided into groups depending on the dominant intention). It has been found that the phatic intention prevails in biliners, letters, greetings. The notification (informing) turned out to be a dominant intention in the PR genres, such as biography, fact-list, backgrounder, press release. The latter – a persuasive group of the PR-texts includes image article, image interview, statement to the media and case-story [Vasilieva, Goryachev, Duskaeva, Konyaeva, Prokofyeva, Tsvetova 2016]. We have chosen the latter of the listed genres not by chance: it is used in the sphere of PR-communications and advertising. The speech structure of case-story was actively used in the texts of modular print advertising in the first half of the twentieth century, when the advertising discourse let in the possibility of verbosity (modern modular advertising has been developed towards super brief messages, resulting in a genre of case-story to be ousted in the sphere of PR; in modern advertising it can be evolved only in the form of a maximum compressed plot scheme).

Typical for the commercial case-story is a narrative structure which comprises three plot elements: the case to have highlighted the problem that happened to the representative of the target audience (1), - the interaction of the character with the product to be advertised (2) -
successful problem solving by means of the product proposed (3). The presence of the plot of
genre gives free scope to involving the addressee into the perception of the text; the story is
dynamic (a high tempo of narrating is kept up), and at the same time the text has many
speech structures that demonstrate the response of the character to what is happening (thus the
character makes the recipient empathize).

In the sphere of business communications, the genre of case-story implies a visual
story furnished with the details about a case of use of a product or service by the consumer.
Let us admit a generalization in order the definition to be applied not only to commercial
advertising and business-PR: in the center of the semantic structure there is a case-story – a
successful experience of interaction of the target audience with a brand or organization.
However, an indication of the thematic dominant seems to be insufficient to characterize the
genre nature of the story-case. The analysis shows that in spite of using the same genre
scheme that is applied in the advertising case-stories, in the context of PR-communications
the compositional and speech structure of the case-story is transformed.

Text Analysis

Consider publications telling about the contribution of the two companies – the JSC
“PromStroySever” (which is the regional branch of the group of companies
“PromStroyContract”) and the LLC “Doka Rus” (a subsidiary of the international concern
“Doka”) to the construction of the Western high-speed diameter - toll express highway linking
the northern areas of St. Petersburg with the south ones. Both texts follow the article about the
Western high-speed diameter in the print version published in St. Petersburg (Russia) of the
journal “Construction and Municipal Services” (№160, 2015). The texts are combined by
information occasion – participation of the basic subject as a supplier in deciding responsible
task set by the customer.

It is logical to assume that the key task of the PR-activity being in strengthening the
image and incrementing the publicity capital of the base PR subject by selective informing is
realized in these texts through the mechanism of cognitive transfer. The very fact of
performing the works for a certain customer within a major project is able to raise the status
of the performing company in the eyes of the target audience, at the same time the client
company as if shares its status with the performing company, so it can be argued that such
information has a real effecting potential. In the commercial advertising a similar mechanism
is observed when considering the opinions of the leaders (a celebrity recommends an item –
therefore, the product is worthy). In the sphere of PR the organization “Our Clients”, an integral
part of many corporate websites, and similar information block included into backgrounder
or booklets is based on the same principle. The main publication (“North-South”) emphasizes
the complexity of the project, we can assume that in the PR-texts following this material, the
persuasive impact will be based on a demonstration of the ability of the base subject of PR
(company-contractor) to successfully participate in fulfilling the complex construction tasks.

Consider the order of speech acts by which the algorithm of persuasion is realized.
The titles of publications are very similar, each of them calls the image-line attributed
to the base subject – that is, its activity; it is a competence in one case, an innovation - in the
other (“The Competent Accompaniment” and “In Innovation Lead”). The leads are also built
on a semantic model: the main speech act in them is an indication of the contribution that the
contractor has made into the project. In the first text by speech means with generalizing
semantics (the set of works of various kinds, a number of other important works), as well as the full name of the organization by specifying belonging (the JSC “PromStroySever”, a subsidiary enterprise of “PromStroyContract”), particular attention is turned to the base subject, the fulfilled tasks are precisely indicated: “A range of works on designing, manufacturing, assembling and disassembling of various kinds of casing and a number of other important works on the construction of the central section of the WHSD is performed by the JSC “PromStroySever”, a subsidiary enterprise of “PromStroyContract”.

In the lead of the second text an emphasis is made, on the contrary, on the specifics of the task fulfilled by the basic subject, and an area of works is called very specifically, with a comprehensive listing of the constructed structures and precise indication of the place of work (“For constructing pylons and bridge footing over the ship fairway in the central area, the WHSD “Doka” has developed a unique formwork equipment”).

The first paragraphs of both texts are constructed according to the following cognitive model: (1) the parameters of the situation are described (the characteristic of the problem that is important in terms of choosing the contractor is emphasized); (2) the following situation feature being a consequence of its properties (to the situations with X are usually attractive for the contractors meeting the criterion of Y) is logically updated; (3) getting the company involved in the works is presented as a consistent result. In the first text: «(1) К работе на крупных ответственных объектах (2) предпочитают привлекать предприятия с большим запасом прочности, который выражается в мощной производственной базе... <...> (3) Не удивительно, что основным поставщиком опалубочного оборудования для Западного скоростного диаметра стал АО «ПромСтройсевер»...”。

In the second text: «(1) С древних времён возведение мостов считается вершиной инженерного искусства. Сегодня к этому относится и создание технически сложного опалубочного оборудования... (2) Неслучайно изготовление опалубки для основных элементов крупнейших современных мостов, как правило, доверяют только мировым лидерам в данной области. (3) Так, бетонирование пилонов... <...> Центрального участка ЗСД осуществлялось с применением продукции компании Doka»./ “(1) Since ancient times, the construction of bridges has been considered to be a pinnacle of engineering. Today this applies to the building of technically complex formwork equipment... (2) It is no coincidence that manufacturing of formwork for the main elements of the major modern bridges tend to be trusted only to the world leaders in this field. (3) Thus, concreting pylons ... <...> of the Central section of the WHSD was carried out applying the products of Doka”. Note that in the first case, the scale of the project and the importance of tasks are actualized (“In work on major important facilities ...”), in the second one - the complexity of the problem (the construction of bridges is represented as a pinnacle of engineering, the problem is formulated as the creation of technically complex formwork equipment) is emphasized via the set metaphor and rational evaluating words.

However, in fact, and in both texts the logic scheme is the same: the situation has a feature of X, that requires involving the contractors fitting with the criterion of Y; in this case, the company Z is to be invited. Thus, the authors using the indirect speech act, intended
for guessing, implant in the mind of the addressee a thesis that the company Z has quality Y. In other words, attaching of image feature to the basic subject is carried out.

Despite almost full coincidence in two texts of the first speech leads, further the compositional and speech structures of the texts are differentiated. The publication covering the JSC “PromStroySever” is continued in the sections “Perspicacious Choice” and “First Region”, where the presentation of the history of development of the company turns into the description of the current state of the basic subject: “Today, more than 15 units function as part of “PromStroyContract”...”. The constructions with the perfective verbs expressing a grammatical meaning of completion of the action introduce to the reader the achievements of the company, at the same time, emphasizing the scale of progress: «в Северной столице развернулось масштабное строительство жилья...», «АО «ПромСтройСевер» наладило сотрудничество с крупнейшими петербургскими застройщиками...», «подразделение развернуло большой фронт работ по всему Северо-западу России...» / “in the Northern capital a large-scale construction of housing has been launched...”, “PromStroySever” has established the cooperation with major St. Petersburg builders ...”, “ the sub-unit has launched a major work front throughout the North-West of Russia ...”. The thesis of the large scale of the company in the “WHSD and others” is supported by introducing a particular image feature - ubiquity of the company: «В Санкт-Петербурге и Ленинградской области не найти ни один знаковый объект последних 20 лет, в той или иной степени не охваченный продукцией или услугами компании «ПромСтройСевер» «In St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region there is no any indicative object for the last 20 years, where in varying degrees the products or services of the company “PromStroySever” are rendered”. The thesis is cited in detail by the employees of the company.

The last paragraphs of the text put forward and substantiate the thesis about reliability of the basic subject - through reference to the presence of the company’s margin of safety (the section is titled “Margin of Safety”). Grounds for confirmation of reliability are power of the production base, highly qualified staff, established communications and ... again, the size of one and the most important units (large design bureau in Samara): «Важным подспорьем в деятельности АО «ПромСтройСевер» служит мощная производственная база... <...> Высокий технический уровень производства обеспечивается квалифицированной технической поддержкой... <...> В Самаре находится крупное проектное бюро... <...> Между региональными подразделениями ГК «ПромСтройКонтракт» чётко наложены корпоративные коммуникации» / “An important tool in the activity of JSC “PromStroySever” is a powerful industrial base... <...> The high technical level of production is provided by a qualified technical support... <...> In Samara there is a major project bureau ... <...> Communications have been clearly established between the regional units of “PromStroyContract””. The publication ends in summarizing: «Компания сопровождает своих партнёров на всех стадиях реализации проектов, связанных с монолитными работами» / “The company supports its partners at all stages of implementation of the projects related to monolithic works”.

The second text is based on the same cognitive model (like the first one, it demonstrates the ability of the underlying subject of PR to decide effectively any task set by the customer), but the correlation of structural elements of the text and a specific set of impressed image features are differentiated. A very brief description of the current state of...
the company (it is presented by the Present Tense forms, without including a historical component), placed in a frame, and the very text is more focused on the specifics of the project. The image characteristics are attributed to the basic subject by using the actualization of cognitive script of “overcoming the difficulties”. It is fundamentally different from the script “problem – solution”, as the latter focuses on the addressee of the possibility of solving the problem, in the case of text realization of the first script, it is important to demonstrate the very process of overcoming the difficulties in solving the problem. First, by exaggerating, explaining in detail the essence of difficulty, and then showing the way the problem was overcome, due to what qualities the basic subject was able to decide the set task, considered text forms an image of the basic subject as a company that is equal to the most difficult tasks.

The section “Unusual Geometry” describes the difficulty - difficult conditions in which the contractor had to work (the unusual in a construction project almost always means “the difficult”, as a non-standard situation requires a non-standard approach): “Shrouds of 620-meter bridge ... <... > are supported by two pylons of 125-meter high ... <...> The pylon has two legs ... <...> The configuration of all these elements in their concreting made high demands of the formwork systems”. The next speech lead acquaints us with the solution found (the design engineer’s story about a unique technical solution applied on the facility): «Для сооружения пилонов с их нестандартной геометрией была разработана конструкция, сочетающая подъёмно-переставную опалубку MF240 и самодвижущуюся SKE plus с дополнительной установкой телескопических платформ. Эти платформы позволили приспособить опалубку к переменному сечению вертикальной конструкции пилона...» / “To build the pylons with their nonstandard geometry, the construction combining a climbing formwork MF240 and self-propelled SKE plus with additional installation of telescopic platforms has been developed. These platforms allowed to adjust the formwork to the variable cross section of the vertical structure of the pylon ... “. The section has the speech lead that correlates a typical practice with a unique situation. It allows the subject of speech to show the complexity of the solved problem by having simultaneously demonstrated an expert status of the company and the scope of its business: «Doka рекомендует применять MF240 и самодвижущуюся SKE plus довольно часто, за последние годы с их помощью было возведено более 600 объектов по всему миру, однако необходимость использования телескопических платформ потребовала особых инженерных решений» / “Doka recommends to use quite often MF240 and self-propelled SKE plus, by means of which more than 600 objects have been erected in recent years all over the world, but the need to use the telescopic platforms requires special engineering solutions”. The following very brief section “The complexity - the Norms” (note that this time the concept of “complexity” is verbalized directly in the headline) puts forward and substantiates the idea that “the company has focused its interest on the complex facilities” on the Russian market. The task complexity inevitably demands complicating the structure of activity that fulfills the tasks of the subject, therefore, in the next section “On the Logic of the Processor and Businessman”, drawing the analogy between the system of filling the orders of “Doka” and modern multi-core processors (comparison base is the ability to simultaneously perform multiple tasks), the subject of speech returns to considering the case: to illustrate the thesis, a number of innovative solutions of the company in the project is described.
The last section “To Save the Main Resource” is constructed in accordance with the same logic as the previous ones. Here a new image feature is introduced - care of the security; at that, the idea that equipment safety is a priority for the company is illustrated on the material of the case: “Опалубочное оборудование Doka для возведения пилонов и опор моста через корабельный фарватер на ЗСД соответствует всем требованиям безопасности” / “Doka formwork equipment for constructing pylons and pillars through the ship fairway on the WHSD meets all safety requirements”.

The ending sentence makes the intention of the subject of speech explicit - demonstrates the company’s capabilities by way of the concrete example: «Деятельность компании на этом участке лишний раз подтверждает её обретённую на российском рынке репутацию производителя высококлассного опалубочного оборудования с уникальными инженерными решениями для технически сложных объектов» / “The company’s activities in this area again confirms its image on Russian market of a manufacturer of a high quality equipment with unique engineering solutions for technically complex facilities”.

As the cases we have studied show, speech genre of the case-story in image-forming speech activity in the field of business-PR implies the realization of a sequence of the following speech acts: 1) demonstration of a problem situation to the customer; 2) suggestion of its solving; 3) presentation of the advantages by the company in solving the problem. It is worth noting that in contrast to the advertising case-story, meant for a mass audience, in image-forming speech activity, intended for professional customers, preference is given to the official, “business-like” style, created by a special selection of stylistic devices. Special terminology, full names of participants of the market, mainly neutral or bookish vocabulary, rational evaluating tools that support impersonal, deliberately objective presentation (which, of course, does not exclude the selectivity in information presentation) are widely used in the texts.

Results

Our study of composition speech structure of the texts (with the analysis of the specific speech acts and eliciting typical cognitive mechanisms) has shown that the publications under consideration that have a common structure of target set are inherent of persuasion. Their purpose - to provide the brand with certain features of image - is achieved by demonstrating the ability of the basic subject of PR (the company-contractor) to take a successful part in the fulfilling complex and large-scale tasks. On a conceptual level, the distinction between the texts is in the actualized parameter of the situation: in the first case a large-scale of the task is emphasized, and in the second one - its complexity. Despite those differences, the model of effect underlying the texts is common: the features of the case (the magnitude in one case, the difficulty in the other), together with the description of the contribution made by a contractor into project realization are used to heighten the basic status of the subject in business environment.

The example provided illustrates the conclusion made in the course of studying the advertising and PR-texts that the investigation of speech leads in terms of the theory of speech genres allows us to see in the area of applied communication the algorithms of speech activity embodied by a special selection of speech means, which are used in professional speech activity to realize professionally claimed meanings.
References