Multiworld structure of the modern world (comparative analysis of articles depicting political diversity between Russia, Europe and the USA)

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Abstract. The present article applies possible-world theory to the analysis of current newspaper articles, that has to date been unexplored in these terms. Deictic categories are used as markers to decode possible worlds depicted in Russian and English newspapers. The main concept, that limits the boundaries of the worlds, is the concept “sanctions”.

Keywords: possible worlds, deictic categories, concept “sanction”.

This article presents an attempt to support a view concerning the existence of numerous “worlds” in a discourse, as well as the art of news-making that has become means of thought-forming and world – creating over the past centuries.

The information of the current world situation that is perceived by an individual comes through a number of ways, among them we may enumerate: 1) mass media; 2) eye-witnessing; 3) mouth-to-mouth informing. The second and the third are not very effective in the way to introduce information to a large amount of people, making mass media the main culprit to form an opinion in the community, country and the world. We are now in the situation when journalism is considered as an art of shaping the perspective of people, not just informing.

The question of influence of mass media was much investigated by many prominent scientists. One of them was Michael Will, who stated in his book “The Mass Media and Language Development ” (1979) that some media which is called “hot” is one that gives to the audience the information without giving a slightest chance for speculation, as it is “well filled with data”. These types of texts are of my linguistic interest in the article.

Mass media and online newspaper texts (e-papers) in particular are governed by certain characteristics that fall into the area of my consideration that we will be collaborated with the theory of possible worlds.

The theory of multiworld model was originally based on the concept of existence of numerous interconnected domains by Deguchi and Oka. The possible worlds are interconnected by means of interpretations, especially in the current political situation, when 1 event is interpreted according to the ideology and order of the country. The possibility of the worlds depends on the background knowledge, political vitality and the assumptions to the facts. Thus, when a reader acquires the information from the article, he/she does so by using the background knowledge, which in the situation of insufficiency is complemented by assumptions.

To illustrate the idea, let’s take one recent fact that was highlighted in the newspapers. Headlines only will be the focus of my analysis. The study is a comparative one and seeks to show similarities and differences in the depicted possible worlds of the mass media.

One of the most popularized concepts in the recent years was the concept of “sanctions”.

First, let’s start with the definition of it, Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as “an action that is taken or an order that is given to force a country to obey international laws by limiting or stopping trade with that country, by not allowing economic aid for that country, etc”. Defining dictionary by Ozhegov gives the following interpretation of the notion “sanction”: “Мера, принимаемая против стороны, нарушающей соглашение, договор, а также вообще та или иная мера воздействия по отношению к правонарушителю” (measure that is taken against the part that has broken an agreement, contract, or any other way to influence the offender — translated by Pushmina S.A.) Larousse (dictionary of the French language) defines it as “mesure répressive infligée par une autorité pour l’inexécution d’un ordre, l’inobservation d’un règlement, d’une loi” (repressive measures imposed by an authority for the failure to comply with a regulation, a law — translation by Pushmina S.A.) Taking into account the definitions we may conclude, that the concept “sanction” has different frame in Russian, English and French. The Russian picture of the world that comprises the concept that was highly used in the Russian media implies the meaning of “breaking an agreement”, whereas, French concept implies “repressive measure” and the English one the verb “to force”. Thus, the linguistic pictures of the world are rather different in the languages under consideration. Semantics is negative in the English and French linguistic worlds, whereas, the Russian reader observes just an implementation of measures, without specifying them as repressive and forcible.

The data analyzed stem from a research project on “possible worlds” in different languages. The discourses analyzed were about the current political situations in the USA, EU and Russia. The study has a corpus-driven design: We read the Russian, English newspaper texts and collected all the data that can roughly describe the possible worlds.

The picture of these possible worlds is decoded from the texts and serves as a holistic model to which the real world is adjusted. The ways to access the possible worlds is the key requirement that influences the way in which the real world of the certain country is understood. The function of the journalism is to make the possible worlds depicted in the texts real for the reader.

According to the discourse theory, and the text world theory, a text’s world is the result of mental representations. We support in the research the point of view of David Lewis, who believed that possible worlds do not differ in kind from the actual worlds, but that each possible world is just as actual from the point of view of its inhabitants as ours is from ours (Lewis 1973).

Let us turn now to some specific examples of linguistic structures where possible worlds have been nominated first, which are headlines of the articles.

To analyze the possible worlds we are to distinguish the markers that help any reader to enter these worlds. Taking into consideration the theory of David Lewis, we believe the possible world is stretched out in space-time. Consequently, lexical units denoting time and space are the locators of the
possible world. Owing to Adams (1974) possible worlds have the type of an entity, that are in some relevant sense total. Thus, they include inhabitants, that are not identical, but their “counterparts” (by D. Lewis). Rescher (1973) stated that comparing to the actual world, possible worlds are “the products of a mental activity, such as dreaming, storytelling, imagining, foretelling”.

To differentiate the actual and the possible worlds we will consider the conception proposed by Lewis, stating that “the actual world” means “the world where I am situated,” and all possible worlds are actualized from the point of view of their inhabitants”.

With this in mind, we may conclude, that all the worlds depicted in the newspaper articles are possible worlds that are opposed to the actual world, not presented there.

In the course of the research, we have taken the corpus of 100 English and 100 Russian articles (dated October-November 2015) devoted to the topic of “sanctions” imposed on the Russian Federation in the recent months. The aim is to try to form the structure of these worlds.

As one of the main stylistic function of any newspaper article to evaluate and bring emotional worth to the piece of information, there are many explicit and implicit means. We will implement deictic categories as parameters to enter the possible worlds, as they serve the role of metasystem as well as the function to hold attention of the reader to a specific time and space. According to Lyons (1977), “the principle of localization” is introduced in lexical as well as tense forms. Tense is traditionally used to offer “location in time”, time reference.


The constant indicator of the time process is the presence of certain references to particular time periods. The temporal universe is as wide as we may note reference to a certain year, month period or present moment. The deictic category of time is presented through grammatical means of Present Indefinite (expects, wants, lack, ask, promises, warns). Present Continuous (are saving, are not working). Present Perfect (has diminished). The use of Present Tenses depicts the time relation of the possible world that corresponds to the time of the real world. Moreover, we come across the lexical units with the temporal semantics, such as attributive structures “six-months” “another (year)”, numerals “2016”, “2015”, nouns: “a year”, “extensions”, “December”, adverbs “never”, “again”, prepositions “after”, adjectives “new”, temporal verbs “begins, awaits, ends, extends”, verbs “following, prolonging, to continue”. They underline that the temporal limits of the current possible world time is extended.

Spatial deictic categories that help to enter the possible world is encoded through the system of prepositions (over, in, on, under), locating expressions (here, there), toponymic realia (Russia, Russian Federation, Moscow, EU, Europe, the USA, Ukraine, Israel, Italy, Serbia, Germany, Japan, Russian Arctic).

Empathy of the articles also helps to enter the possible world as it gives an emotional and tangible effect. Such an effect helps the readers to enter the possible world depicted by the newspapers. This is the strongest tool to shape the minds of the nations. It is achieved in the English newspapers through verbs: “risk, ignore, bleed, don’t fool, ended, bans, hurt, warns, violates, deteriorates, fight, bite”; nouns: “pressure, threat, crisis, violations, no goal”; adjectives: “tough, silent, harder”; attributes: “anti-Russian”. Lexical means emphasize the hard situation over sanctions for the Russian Federation in the possible world of the analyzed texts.

The possible picture of the world in Russian articles is different. We have covered 100 articles from newspapers, such as РИА Новости, Газеты.ru, Правда, Аргументы и факты, Утро, Русская Планета, Репортер, Лента, Деловой Петербург, Воронежский курьер, Взгляд, Петербургский дневник, Аргументы и факты, Деловая газета, Дин и т.д. All the articles are devoted to the concept “sanctions”.

The space localizations are same numerous as in the English newspapers, including such toponyms as: EC (EU), Europe (Europe), РФ (RF), Россия (Russia), Австралия (Australia), США (USA), Франция (France), Сербия (Serbia), Израиль (Israel), Казахстан (Kazakhstan), Польша (Poland), ФРГ (FRG), Италия (Italy), Словакия (Slovakia), Чехия (Czech Republic/Greece (Greece), Британия (Britain), Сирия (Syria), Эстония (Estonia), and some cities. Киев (Kiev), Крым (Crimea), Москва (Moscow). The localization of sanctions is redirected towards Russia, thus the authors use such attributes as “агрессорское” (anti-Russian), “внешние (рынки)” (foreign market), “иностранные коллеги” (foreign colleagues) and prepositions “против” (against), “за рубежом” (abroad).

The time is decoded through tenses of the verbs used in the past (объявлена/ determined, подтверждена/confirmed, назначена/stated), present (требует/demands, нарушает-violates), future (не станет/ will not, не отменит/will not cancel). We have also noticed lexical units with temporal semantics, such as в декабре (December), adverb посферее (soon), numeral 2016, time preposition после (after).

Narrative markers giving clues for interpreting the possible world in Russian articles help to visualize the world. Such markers include verb phrases “отменять санкции” (cancel sanctions), “вести санкции” (lift sanctions), “ослаблять санкции” (ease sanctions), “нарушать санкции” (violate sanctions), “меняют отменять санкции” (dreams to call off sanctions), “санкции наложены” (tired of sanctions), “отказал в вводе санкций” (refused to introduce sanctions), “незачем были убытки” (be dissatisfied due to sanctions), “не поддерживаю санкции” (do not support sanctions), “вышел из-под санкций” (exclude out of sanction list) adjectives, attributed to the concept sanction: “прекращающее” (harmful), “убытки” (losses), “удар” (by the means of the economy from sanctions) (shock of the German economy). Lexical units show the consequences of the imposed sanctions on European countries, but not Russia.

Thus, we have interpreted deictic forms in the context analysis that allowed us entering the possible worlds depicted in 2 different cultures (English and Russian). The possible worlds are different due to different policy of the countries. Entering these possible worlds, the readers take all the rules, forming certain opinion about the situation around them. The main aim of journalism in the current situation is to emphasize the part of the reality convenient for the government to get support from the nation. Thus, the possible worlds are created with a certain purpose.
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