

Dynamics of Political Meanings: Interpretation and Understanding in Journalism

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: Analysts of the Russian Reporter magazine having examined popular political vocabulary of recent years revealed a new interpretation of the traditional semantics of war, state, democracy, class, nationalism, right, revolution, market, freedom and church concepts. The new meanings of traditional concepts in relation to the concepts of media sphere researchers point at the nature of the political consciousness of modern Russian society. **Methods:** The essence of the actual problem defines the approaches applied to the study. A content analysis method (target sampling from three editions) was used at the quantitative level. A combination of attitudinal analysis and a modified method of critical discourse analysis (CDA) was employed at the quantitative level. By connecting techniques, firstly, we depart from fixing attention on the syntax in favor of the detailed study of the selected concepts' semantics traditional for many studies within CDA; secondly, instead of the concept of the "norm" traditional for CDA, we draw attention to the academically established meanings which is promoted by the use of elements of the linguistic study of the semantic shift. Thus, methodologically the work is a combination of content analysis, attitudinal analysis and critical discourse analysis. **Findings:** - Dynamics of meanings of different concepts is asynchronous; - due to asynchrony the dynamics of meanings correlates with the degree of the concept abstractedness; - the process of transition from the attitudinal instability of the concepts to their attitudinal certainty is recorded. **Application/Improvements:** A further expansion of samples will allow considering the dynamics of the media semantics in relation to the political orientation of the publication.

Keywords: Attitudinal Media Analysis, Media Concept, Media Interpretation, Semantic Dynamics, Understanding in Journalism

Introduction

Analysts of the Russian Reporter magazine studied and commented the list of popular concepts of the political vocabulary in recent years that had changed their meanings significantly: war, state, democracy, class, nationalism, right, revolution, market, freedom, church¹. Journalists and their interlocutors believe that "with further development of technologies—both military and informational—the war begins to be perceived as perhaps the most common thing, without which it is impossible to achieve one's goals by both the state and certain groups of citizens"². The Russian media forming the semantic field of the media sphere, where the traditional socio-cultural meanings are interpreted in a modern paradigm

are also responsible for such a perception. The new values, or media concepts of these meanings in relation to their academically established definitions form the so-called "scissors", which points at the aspect of journalism functioning that has not yet been studied: firstly, it is a media expression of the transformation of the political consciousness of society; secondly, the expression of the dynamics in the journalistic sense of the world. In the second case the journalist is a subject of understanding, which educational opportunities are practically inexhaustible, on the one hand, because the people for whom he writes are inexhaustible; on the other hand, they are limited. Limitations are related to his/her mental and physical abilities and the lack of laboratory research equipment. Certainly, the technical aspect of the issue

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is less important than a person's ability to understand the world by virtue of intelligence and culture inherent to him, which is "this stock of knowledge, from which communication participants draw their interpretations. Their life-world contains and transmits the previous experience of interpretive practices and cultures"³. Limitations are associated also with the context, which in this case is "not that other, as our environment, that is constantly created by particular relevant conditions. The hermeneutic issue involves clarifying communication conditions"⁴. Inexhaustible reserve of journalistic understanding of the world lies in the dialog nature of reality reflection that is typical to its profession: "a cognitive activity as a subject-subjective relationship to the object of cognition in the culture system is fundamentally dialogical by the nature of the cognitive project"⁵.

Dialogical embodiment of journalistic understanding of life has both rational and sensual nature. And in this sense, the main understanding of his/her world is still intuitive whatever methods and techniques will be applied by a journalist in his/her professional activities. However, journalistic intuitive judgment never seems flawless and indisputable; there are always questions to its correctness. "Meanwhile, the credibility, the authority of the intuitive appreciation of truth, the authority of intuitive judgments should be no less than the authority of reasoning, otherwise all the cognition of the world will be impossible"⁶, this is an opinion of E. L. Feinberg, a famous physicist, academician, no less well-known also as a profound philosopher and connoisseur of art who passed away a little over than a decade ago.

Understanding of the world in journalism is objectively predestined by the dynamics of social life. And that is why it has its own dynamics, the intensity of which can be recorded both at the empirical level (this is what the writers of the Russian Reporter magazine did), and at the theoretical level - by the media researchers. Analysis of the dynamics implies a choice of conditional starting point. We assume the body of knowledge received at school and college to be this starting point of dynamics in understanding of the world by a journalist. It is here, through a complex of scientific and educational materials that interpretations of the most important aspects of life of society and a person are formed in the future journalist's mind based on definitions that are academically verified and recorded by relevant dictionary entries. There are also those concepts among them which are noted by Russian Reporter analysts in the particular case.

The question about journalistic advanced understanding of the world has been not raised for the first time. But until now, journalistic understanding of socially significant events, phenomena, facts of theory and practice mainly relates to the audience factor—informational interests and needs of the audience. Only half a century ago, a well-known TV journalist⁷ saw the basic meaning of his TV shows in the fact that in his opinion, they formulate ideas and problems before, probably, the audience would be able to do it itself; in other words, Frost as a practitioner formulated the professional value of advanced understanding in the journalist's work. In the field of theory, researchers unanimously noted the need to be able to see and hear their reader, viewer, to respond to his/her concerns and needs, to help bring the reader's opinion to consciousness of the wide audience – both the society as a whole and the relevant authorities. It was treated as the ability to be at the level of their audience interests and concerns, and to advance it in exactness of public statement of these problems, which required a high level of journalist education. A gradual transition of theorists to the idea of journalistic advanced understanding appeared simultaneously with this approach. "On the one hand, a journalist should have a broad, universal erudition in different spheres of social practice; on the other hand, he/she needs to develop the special mind flexibility and receptivity to new knowledge. The structure of the journalistic awareness focuses on a peculiar type of imagination aimed at the fast development of fresh information, its associative linking with already known data, interpretation of problems relevant for the society"⁸.

The problem of studying concepts of political discourse in the media sphere as projections of socio-political tensions in the society is not comprehensively reflected in foreign studies, although the subject of socio-political conflicts in the media and methods of discourse analysis are consistently conceptualized by Western authors. Thus, in the issues of discourse analysis methodology, we relied primarily on the works⁹. Bibliography on critical discourse analysis is quite extensive; it is worth noting the guide out of recent works¹⁰⁻¹¹ and application recommendations¹².

Conceptualization of specific concepts, which are used in the work, are found in studies by different authors. Thus, the media influence on the perception of category of "war" with an emphasis on the leading role of television was analyzed in the works by De Franco¹³ and Hoskins¹⁴; a comparative analysis of approaches to "war"

category in eastern and western Europe was undertaken by E. Balabanova¹⁵.

The problem of journalism cultures that affect the character of conceptualization and understanding of reality in the media is quite relevant and widely studied on different empirical layers. For example, a study by Coleman and Wilkins demonstrates a lack of communication between journalists' formal characteristics and their moral development, i.e. the ability to think critically about the key value categories¹⁶. The ongoing global study supervised by T. Hanitzsch¹⁷ deeply examines factors affecting the journalist' understanding of social and political reality.

Problems of framing and constructing reality in the political discourse are viewed from different methodological perspectives. We relied on the works by Entman¹⁸, Fairhurst and Sarr¹⁹ taking into account local studies. For example, a German researcher Peiser complemented our approach by the idea that the private formation of an agenda of the day by a journalist is of great importance for the formation of the agenda at the level of the global media market²⁰.

In general, it is worth emphasizing that the developed theme and methodological approach represents a new interpretation of the known categories. The relevance and reliability of the chosen direction was confirmed at international conferences and seminars in discussions with foreign colleagues (e.g: The Church and the Media in Post-secular Society seminar at the University of La Sapienza (Rome-1);²¹ Bridges Across Culture, the First International Conference on Arts and Humanities;²² Religions: Fields of Research, Methods and Perspectives Conference, Jagiellonian University, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin;²³ Comparing Media beyond the Nation State Seminar , Free University of Berlin;²⁴ etc.).

Concept Headings

N. D. Arutyunova²⁵, a leading specialist in the field of lexicography expressed very interesting idea having the methodological significance that "an analysis of axiological concepts and their definitions in philosophers' works approaches to the analysis and definition of the meanings of corresponding words in the linguistic and lexicographical practice. There is also a similarity in methods of analysis used by philosophers and linguists. Therefore, it seems possible to bring to the consideration the semantics

of attitudinal words outlooks and considerations of philosophers and logicians not included in the linguistic usage"²⁵. In our opinion, the reverse, in addition, expansive reading of the rule is also admissible: to use research methods used in the lexicology in the works of philosophers, political scientists, theorists of the media in some cases. Thus, the authors of this article used the method of comparing the meanings of the same words in different historical periods. The main purpose of the study provided the reference to this approach, in which two stages of its achieving are distinguished: first, the identification of semantic differences between the academic knowledge about the culture-filtered subject the and the presentation of this subject in the journalistic work generated by media practice; second, the determination of variability in the nature of social awareness in journalism based on the obtained results of the study.

Thus, the research approach to identify the semantic shift in the selected concepts of media practice which are included in the sample, defined the nature of this analysis as a whole, thereby subduing other methods under usage. In this paper we applied the content analysis method (target sampling of three editions) at the quantitative level. A combination of value analysis and modified method of critical discourse analysis (CDA) was used at the quantitative level. By connecting techniques, firstly, we depart from concentrating attention on the syntax in favor of the thorough study of semantics of selected concepts traditional for many researches within CDA; secondly, instead of "norm" concept, that is traditional for CDA, we draw attention to the academically established meanings what is promoted by the use of elements of the linguistic study of the semantic shift. Thus, the study of the dynamics of semantic changes in the media sphere methodologically is a combination of content analysis, value analysis and critical discourse analysis.

Updated meanings of concepts established in the science and recorded in the journalistic works should be considered as final, but constantly changing and being fluid point of dynamic process marked by us. That is why we used a list of such terms that are the empirically established in the Russian Reporter, and we selected three socio-political magazines with a different mission and the audience as an object of study, that were included in the top ten according to the citation in 2014²⁶. It is Russian Reporter itself, aimed at moderately liberal intellectual middle class, highlights the life of the country in its different regions; Ogonyok magazine is published for the

same audience, but its approach to the coverage of social and political phenomena are based on journalistic traditions of Soviet journalism. And, finally, Profile business magazine is addressed to the business elite of more liberal attitudes when compared with the Russian reporter and Ogonyok audience. Among them political positions of Russian reporter differ by notable conservatism.

Methodology

Calendar frame of samples are from September to December 2014. The indicated period was marked by an escalation of political tensions in the world of diplomacy between Russia, Ukraine, Europe and the USA, as well as the deteriorating of economic situation in the country against the backdrop of falling oil prices. Political conflict, which was exacerbated by the economic crisis, prompted journalists to be more active than ever and to understand the key ideological and political modern categories. All texts relating to the coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict were selected to specify the selection totality (Russian Reporter - 15, Ogonyok – 121, Profile – 118). It also takes into account that “it is necessary to examine not only the text itself but also its interaction with the context included in the message for the discourse analysis”²⁷. Therefore, the frequency of use of the categories main for the study (war, power, government, freedom, rights, democracy, crisis, revolution, modernization, nationalism, church) was analyzed at the stage of pilot study. As a result of piloting the most frequent categories were retained: war, power, state, freedom, law, crisis, revolution, church.

As it is well-known, “a set of established meanings is always the result of the struggle and engagement between the dominant and opposing to them meanings. This struggle results in the semantic shift that is automatically carried over to all contexts”²⁸. Proceeding from this statement, we confirmed the semantic weight of each category for the selected texts using the TextAnalyst program. The semantic contingency of selected categories with the step up to 4 words on the right and left side of desired word was analyzed by Concordance program in the next step. The resulting list was transformed into a table containing the least expected interpretations, when compared with the academic lexical entries. In general, the research procedure is based on the correlation of significant elements of the media discourse with strong value aspects of categories whose status is established in academic knowledge.

According to our hypothesis, the new meanings of traditional concepts in relation to academically well-established ones indicate the nature of changes expressed in the media sphere of the political consciousness of society, as well as the journalist understanding of the world, which may be ahead of scientific knowledge in current political issues. Keywords organize media space, in which the search for meaning always relies on a value basis of discourse, pointing to a stable relationship between the categories and the perception of their importance. Valuable interpretation of media discourse, with all its contradictions, up to the misunderstanding of a language is a tool of learning the essence of conflicts concerning the value attitudes of the author and the public. “Value characteristics can be detected by comparing it with the related phenomena (norm, necessity, attitude, belief). Moreover, a language and communicative activity are important forms of representation of values and provide an access to the value-normative system of society”²⁹. But they only open, because it is difficult to ignore the obvious, that “value is not just a value, it is a value for someone”³⁰. Nevertheless, it is necessary to adhere to the statement in the framework of the study, that the effect of translation of new meanings to the audience is unknown to us and this is the task of further stages of the study.

Results

As a result of the computer analysis of texts the following data were obtained (See Table 1).

An empirical analysis of the weekly Russian publications, in the procedure of which the correlation of media discourse vocabulary with value categories recorded in the academic knowledge was included, showed:

- There are differences between the academic knowledge about the culture-filtered subject and representation of the subject in the journalistic work, due to media dynamics of meanings referred to by a journalist; in addition, the interpretation of political meanings is connected with possible conflicts of the author, audience and media researcher’s value attitudes;
- The presence of media dynamics of meanings is recorded both in compilations of magazines under study and in respect to each concept selected for the study;
- There is an escalation of linguistic tensions in the media (a period of language deideologization, recorded by researchers in the 1990s, is over), but the dynamics

Table 1.

| Journal | The number of fragments by keyword | 1–4 order semantic relation |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Russian Reporter magazine (15 texts) | War = 112 | civil1, world1, undeclared1, governmental1, fascists4, state1, holy4, life4, put on thinking cap4, Orthodoxy2, civil1, informational1, was triggered off1, to belief2, politics2, play3, ideology3, unemployment1, historical1, time1, cold1 |
| | Power = 30 | hide1, sponsor2, attack3, important4, real1, clever1, war2, domination2, politics2, philanthropic3, principal3, consistent4, establishment1, wants2, weaker3, real4, own1, current1, compromises2, ratings3, values4 |
| | Right = 13 | moral1, derogate1, give2, ethnos4, bless1, death4, russian4, kill1, pigs2, self-identification4, assert1, businessmen1, human1 |
| | Freedom = 10 | death4, deprivation1, demand2, sentenced3 |
| Ogonyok magazine (121 texts) | War = 190 | propoganda1, invasion1, corruption1, humanitarian2, civil3, intervention3, propogandistic1, informational1, outlook1, terroristic1, reforms3, elections4, expences4, cold1, backstage1, temptation1, trigger off1, domination1, political1 |
| | Power = 201 | independent1, vertical structure1, removability1, decentralization1, confidence1, paralysis1, help1, echelon1, destructive2, elections2, miracles2, case1, protesters1, independent1, flith1, calmness1, strong1, distrust1, compliant1, separatists1, freak1 |
| | Right = 44 | victims1, civil1, home1, social1, norms1, disturbance2, respect2, freedom2, election1, animal1, lynch law2, wholeness2, sovereignty1, lynch law2, life2, nuclear2 |
| | Freedom = 26 | internal1, losses1, pocket1, rare1, right2, territory3, cerebrate1, think1, creative1 |
| | State = 102 | war1, communications1, money1, law-bound1, weapon1, wholeness1, repression1, budget2, businessmen2, banks2, crime2, menaces2, church2, sovereign1, individual1, pressed1, presses1, territory1 |
| | Revolution = 28 | fighter1, industrial1, won1, orange1, in the name of1, church2, disappointment2, life2, ideals2, father2 |
| | Church = 46 | departments1, ruined1, great1, institute1, confession1, values1, revolutions2, the richest2, help1, free1, risks1, capabilities2, humanitarian2 |
| | Crisis = 33 | financial1, scaled1, serious1, systems1, enmity1, management1, stagnation2, sanctions2 |
| Profile magazine (118 texts) | War = 280 | cold1, civil, world1, impossibility1, stirring1, prevention1, escalation1, nuclear1, conflict1, facsism2, capability2, fervor2, training1, alien1, equalize1 |
| | Power = 248 | shift1, rating1, self-seeking1, took advantage1, democratic1, financial1, separatists1, chances2, uncontrolled2, decentralization2, authoritativeness2, system2, servants2, oil1, illegal1, facsists1, illegitimate1, adapted, annex2, relax2, omnivorous2, junta2 |
| | State = 178 | national1, authoritarian1, bandit1, costs1, tireless1, arragement1, prosperity2, control2, paralised2, independent1, nuclear1, currency1, deprives of1, expands1 |
| | Freedom = 34 | limit1, full1, manoeuvre1, exit2, sell2, increase1, word1, trip1, conscience2, national2, strengthening2, economics2 |
| | Crisis = 83 | Large-scale1, serious1, systemic1, civilizational1, nationalistic1, fester1, humans1, economic1, scenarios1, forces1, stimuls, long-term2, suffer2 |
| | Right = 50 | norms1, guaranteed1, civil1, veto1, received2, effective2 |
| | Revolution = 25 | antiauthoritarian1, export1, pay2 |

of meanings of different concepts is asynchronous, in some cases it is expressed especially clearly (for example, in relation to the “war” concept), in other cases it is less expressed, up to negative meanings;

- Media reflects/stimulates the growth of public attention to the concepts of religious and secular discourses—“blasphemy”, “sacred”, “cultural memory”; furthermore, it is recorded that the asynchronous of dynamics of meaning is correlated with the measure of concept abstractiveness – the more abstractive it is, the more loosely it is interpreted by journalist;
- The transition process from value instability of concepts to their value certainty, leading to marking the key categories of social and political discourse by different labels is recorded;
- Journalistic understanding of the world, thus, is anticipatory; transforming meanings, journalists not only demonstrate the involvement in social issues, but also are ahead of the audience in the exactness of these problems setting; the conclusion according to which the language of misunderstanding precedes real political conflicts, attracts a special attention;
- The research allows concluding that the value instability of media interpretation of meanings is associated with the journalist’s ambivalent ability to sensual understanding of the subject of his/her analysis. Sensuous understanding of the world is the highest manifestation of basic competencies of the journalist that sees “an event as a flash” and interprets this event “in online mode”, assuming that the subject of journalistic interest is subjectively scaled by him/her by the most important value grounds: “positive – negative”, “beautiful – ugly”, “good – evil”.

Results of our work are the first step of a comprehensive study of the dynamics of media semantics within the social understanding theory. In this article we affirm the objective existence of the dynamics in the Russian media space and highlight its main features. A further sample collection extension allows considering the dynamics of the media semantic in relation to the political orientation of the publication and, as a consequence, will lead to a comprehensive value study of the Russian media.

Discussion

Value interpretations of media discourse with all the contradictions, up to the language of misunderstanding, are

the tools for searching different meanings in mass media texts, finding conflicts of values of the author and of his/her audience. The language of misunderstanding anticipates, and sometimes initiates political conflicts. Thus, analyzing the coverage of Russian-Ukrainian confrontation shows high degree of the press political language polarization in 2014-15. Just making use of a preposition (“on Ukraine” or “in Ukraine”) determines speaker’s belonging to a corresponding ideological and political camp. Moreover, the same cultural product can be “read” in different ways, even though the dominating meaning has already been interwoven in there³¹. It should be noted that the mass media origins of confrontation as regards prepositions “in” or “on” are much more profound; and the media have been making a considerable contribution to escalating the language tensions for quite a long time. While the researches of the 1990s marked some loss of ideology in the language, today the situation changed drastically, its politicization has started afresh, and overall ideological load on sociopolitical discourse has increased.

Within the framework of this study, the authors relied, among other ideas, on the idea of framing, which is understood in communication science as translating the abstractions that organize and texture the meaning of a message. The idea voiced by J. Hoffman as early as 1974, has been reconsidered in many studies. Thus, for example, Fairhurst and Sarr¹⁹ have described a number of categories identifying the presence of frame in a message in 1996. Among other categories, they identified “spin” that is expressed as a concept carrying some definite value-based judgment (either positive or negative). On the face of it, the value overtone of this concept is not obvious to the audience and it carries preconception by definition. Robert M. Entman uses a metaphor of cascade to describe the chain of translating concrete meanings from power elites and media elites to the audience by means of mass media and media environment¹⁸. Therefore, it seemed especially important that the publications that were ultimately aimed at elite in the mass audience should have been selected for the purpose of this study.

One of the most semantically intense categories proved to be the category of “war” that has been actualized over recent years due to a number of internal and international conflicts founded on contradistinguishing two international principles of “right of nations to self-determination” and “territorial integrity of states”. The value aspects of this category will be considered later in this study.

The academic interpretation has been taken from relevant sources dated 1985, 2001 and 2010. In a publication dated 1985, the meaning of this category is predetermined by political contents that characterizes either progressive or reactionary role of war... “every war is of just or unjust nature”³². This meaning is, to a large degree, identical to that found in a modern academic text: “Wars can be civil or external, just or unjust, wars of liberation or wars of aggression”³³. At the same time, the analysis of the great number of texts from *Ogonyok* magazine only (190 references) showed that the category of war have lost its former value status and has acquired somewhat economical flavor. In *Russian Reporter and Profile* the word “war” was used 112 and 280 times accordingly. The closest associative bonds were, on the one hand, the traditional stable links, such as “threat”, “defense”, and, on the other hand, the new links, such as “economy”, “market” and even “opportunity”. “Cold” has been an adjective mostly used in journalistic texts under analysis bearing both political and value meaning simultaneously. Adjective “cold” occurring together with the word “war” was found in all publications. However, it was not unexpected.

Cold war, a standoff between the USSR and the USA, was a political phenomenon in the second half of the last century. Of course, as compared to “hot” large-scale war, such as the Second World War, the cold war, to some degree, even proved to be a factor of political progress; no battles were fought with nuclear weapon. At the same time, almost equally awful peripheral wars, such as a war in Vietnam, were raging. Therefore, when in the end of the 20th century, it finally seemed that the history of the cold war was finished; the world community gave a sigh of relief. That is exactly why the epithet “cold”, applied to war, on its return to social and political journalism, was met as a sign of political recession. Journalists, who instinctively felt some problems in politics, were the first persons to note its danger: they were stirred by the things they saw in their lives, associative links in their memories started working. And all this took place notwithstanding the fact that for many of the authors of magazine articles, in view of their age, the history of cold war was not associated with their personal reminiscences. It was the knowledge obtained from other people, “but what a man takes from this knowledge depends on both the knowledge and the man himself. The foundation of human orientation in different types of information is a value factor”³⁴.

Some associative bonds have been found that were not readily expected, among them such links as

“unemployment”, “corruption”, “temptation”, “trigger”, “humanitarian”, “training”, “makes equal”. This being said, some definitions of war have been found highlighting its specific features in the 21st century: civil, information, propaganda, nuclear, terrorist. Emblematic were such verbs as “fuel” and “prevent” in relation to “war”, as warfare is no longer perceived as an elemental and uncontrollable disaster, but rather as military and political action, a project that could be prevented, predicted, instigated, forced or weakened, depending on political will of certain leaders.

Thus, the findings from journalist texts are thrown into sharp relief against the established understanding of the concept of war that is fixed in authoritative dictionaries, where wars are subdivided into - let us supplement the already given definitions by one more academic definition in which the value aspect of the meaning becomes especially apparent - into “just and unjust, progressive and reactionary, holly and aggressive”³⁵. Our idea about the value dynamics of such concept as “war” should also be enhanced with one more general judgment that is most apparently exemplified by the change in the meaning of this concept. Over the last centuries, affected by culture, the attitude toward war has drastically changed in society: there is nothing left from former “rapture of battle”; in both fiction and journalism, the war has now been unveiled to show its true, mostly unpleasant face. Such understanding of war in social consciousness has been fixed by culture in general and this proved possible, because “culture is the way of thinking, feeling, believing”³⁶. Thereat, no academic definition reflecting the universal meaning of the phenomenon appeared to be swayed in any way. Nevertheless, within the framework of value dimension, the understanding of war by a journalist or by a writer should always be one step ahead.

Further on, semantic metamorphoses associated with the word “freedom” have been investigated. This idea, in classical interpretation, is divided in two poles: “negative freedom”, representing freedom from deprivation, exploitation, social and national oppression, that is a prerequisite for “positive freedom” for creative work, for fulfilling one’s life mission, for comprehensive personal development³⁷. It is maintained that “people are not free to choose the objective conditions for their activity, manifested as the necessity; however, they do possess concrete and relative freedom when they preserve the opportunity to select objectives and the means for attaining them”³⁸. In journalism, freedom is most often associated with its

negative side, with deprivation, with constraints; and its creative interpretation is contemplated at the internal level, that is “to think”, “to conceive”, “an isle”. The idea of freedom in journalism is blended with the realization of rights as well as with spiritual categories “conscience” and “national”. Journalistic expression of freedom in the context of such ideas as “to sell” and “economy” testifies of the trend for pragmatic perception of established scientific categories in the framework of modern civilization development. Of course, we cannot assume that direct perception and understanding of the world by journalists should be regarded as a phenomenon of a higher order as compared to academic knowledge fundamental for a journalist. To a journalist, a subjective viewpoint and a fast reaction to the observed are intrinsic, and that does not always help making precise and profound conclusions. Thus, no “viewpoint should stick to a subject of self-contemplation or to a subjective experience”³⁹.

It should also be noted that, based on the result of the analysis, it was evident to what a degree the understanding of freedom in journalism has been predetermined by the social and political standing of the magazine. Thus, in Russian reporter freedom was associated with deprivation and even with death. In *Ogonyok* it was also related to asperities, but there are still positive associations pointing out why freedom was important for the authors of the magazine: freedom of thought, internal freedom of man, freedom as personal rights. In *Profile*, moral, ethical and ethnic values are present (conscience, national); however, the top position was shared by the values of economic order, for example, freedom to sell. This understanding does not match the classical ideas of philosophic and value-based contents of freedom, which “in accordance with a right and dutiful decision includes an important problem of elevating freedom from tyranny to creativity. Freedom is a characteristic feature of the action performed in the following manner: 1) with good knowledge and understanding of objective constraints, 2) without being forced, 3) under the conditions of selecting opportunities, 4) as a result of right (dutiful) decision: owing to his intellect, a man is capable of making his own choice, deviating from evil and aspiring toward good”³⁸.

Categories of “power” and “state” are often met in the texts of political nature; however, “power” prevails in absolute figures (30 against 0 in Russian reporter, 201 and 102 in *Ogonyok*, 248 and 178 in *Profile*). Fundamental classical constructions suggest, though in different versions, understanding power through violence, “the form

of social relations characterizing the ability to affect the nature and the directions of individual activities...by means of authority, tradition and violence”⁴⁰. The analysis of the associative bonds shows that “authority” and “domination” move to the background when correlated with “power vertical” and “peace”. At the same time, finances, oil and business could belong here as well. As compared to other countries, “power” could be hard to deal with, self-serving, fascist, illegitimate, paralyzed. Thereat, “one’s own” power is unambiguously personified. While earlier the subject of action was mostly represented by “state”, now this is exactly the “power” that “gets weird ideas”, that is seen as unpredictable. Meanwhile, the state as a de-personified subject “takes away” and “spends”. Academic interpretation reads, “state proper, as an instrument of political management, is neither absolute good nor absolute evil”⁴¹, though, according to encyclopedic interpretation, it is “the dictatorship of a certain exploitative class, it establishes and protects the interests of this class”⁴².

However, today in journalistic understanding, the state, similar to power, seems to possess certain type of consciousness and will to act that can be evaluated. Partially, this could be explained by a rule formulated by T. Van Dijk⁹: “Fundamental values, norms and power regulations are seldom argued about explicitly in the dominating mass media. ...all pattern of arguments and criticism is often intentionally organized and controlled... [in as much as] discourse plays a key part in realizing power, it can realize power directly and in coercive manner”. However, the undertaken analysis of magazines, all of them being more or less related to liberal and oppositional spectrum of Russian mass media, shows that the opinion of Van Dijk as regards the inclusion of the opposition media in the above mentioned process has not been confirmed. More likely, the statement of the famous scientist does not possess universal character; therefore, the comments on the results of journalistic analysis of the effect produced by power on mass media should always be given in more details. At the same time, one could agree with Van Dijk on the fact that the state cares, in the first place, about “control over commonly accepted social group representations, inasmuch as it is exactly them who finally determine what people do and say in different real-world situations in the course of their lifetime”⁹. Power and state are, in this case, two key categories in which the meaning dynamics is most apparent. Dominance of “power” over “state” as over the subject of action and the

mass media violence of the elite against the electorate “bring up” the audience at the language level. It should also be noted that this upbringing is established on the necessity to ensure a common perception of power and state by all social groups, while with regard to other categories the conflict type of perception can be formed as well based on dissension of values.

Category of “rights” is key for public discourse in modern democratic society; therefore, such associated definition as “civil” is the most frequently met and it is the most powerful in mass media texts. Two extremes are represented in this case by infringement on or by protection of those rights. The category of less expected associations included “ethnos”, “death”, “kill”, “beastly”, “mob law”. Characteristically, the more evident the liberal standing of the publisher is, the more frequent is the occurrence of that or another meaning of rights in publications: Russian Reporter accounts for 13 references (the stress is laid on the issues of right infringement, moral value of right and of man as a bearer of rights); Ogonyok accounts for 44 cases (the law and the rights are predominantly considered in terms of sovereignty and civil rights); Profile has 50 references (here also the emphasis is laid on civil rights at the same time highlighting the regulations and guarantees in this respect).

Media understanding of law proved to be less subject to meaning (sense) dynamics, as compared to other categories; all cases of emphasizing, discovered in the course of analysis, do not, on the one hand, go beyond the value definition of law given in the academic dictionary, that reads that “the abstract universality of law is associated with intrinsic justice, that expresses and embodies the origins of law, the principle of abstract universal equality and freedom”⁴³. On the other hand, one could proceed further on and note that the mass media understanding of law proves to be even narrower, than it is suggested by science. Moreover, one of recent academic studies maintains that considering the law “two approaches can be identified: 1) natural law approach that is put in opposition to positive law; 2) liberal and legal approach that differentiates the right and the law”⁴⁴. Nothing of the above mentioned, still less anything going beyond academic knowledge, has been discovered in the texts under analysis. Thus, journalistic anticipating perception of the world cannot be considered a universal rule for all times and places. Understanding in journalism is contextually selective, and therefore, it is neither comprehensive nor universal. While the idea of “freedom” was met once

within the association bonds, the closely related ideas of “justice” and “equality” appeared to be excluded from this logical link. In a way, this is an unconscious incident that is recognized by scientists as framing, affecting the perception of political situation by the audience. Thus, Jim Kuypers maintains that even the word sequence in a sentence represents an identifier of a certain political frame⁴⁵.

The idea of revolution in mass media discourse becomes almost boundless, all-encompassing. This happened “thanks” largely to revolution waves invading different regions of the world. “Orange” revolution, “Arab spring” became stable identifiers of rapid changes in global political environment. Not surprisingly, the reminiscences of those meanings are present in all information streams that are related to manifestation of political spontaneity.

Within the period under investigation, such category as “revolution” did not become the most frequent (Russian Reporter accounts for 0; Ogonyok accounts for 28; Profile accounts for 25). Nevertheless, in the abovementioned cases, sense dynamics has been observed: the attention of the authors has been drawn by textually fixed economical associations linked to the idea of revolution, for example, “export” or “pay”. Though, inasmuch as in the mass media environment a revolution is opposed to terrorism, it usually has positive connotation, it has a romantic touch. However, this has not been so distinctly expressed now. The main thing is that such expression as “export of revolutions” comes back to the language of social and political journalism, acquiring strong negative connotation. It should be noted that the category of revolution attracted such spiritual field categories as frustration, church, shame. In this respect, the mass media meanings are not so much different from academic meanings: “Revolution is associated with the ideas of progress, development that includes the aspects of negation, contradiction, ups and downs, elimination of negation, as though returning to old times in the course of ascending the spiral”⁴⁶.

The perception of the idea of revolution as an elemental phenomenon transformed in political and the mass media environment into a process that is strictly controlled, that is directly related to every day political life. This controlled pseudo-revolution process, identified as “banalization” in academic literature, becomes an element of a mass media show that is performed not even on the television screens, but on Youtube, on the recordings of dashboard cameras, in the entries of social network users. Moreover, this is consistent with what Douglas Kellner

says about “terrorist show” that, in his opinion, could be created at any time and in any place by just one person literally within 15 minutes, if he has access to media⁴⁰. This technology does not differ much from the technology of creating “revolution show”. Thus, revolution is transformed from being a social political revolt into a mass media clash of political interests and values. While one of the academic definitions of revolution stipulates such prerequisites as “maturity of objective and subjective factors and the presence of the revolution situation on the ground”, at the same time, its “major task, taking political power” is still common for the social political revolt and for the mass media “revolution show”.

The attention of the analysts and the focus of this study on the interpretations of such category as “church” in the magazines under analysis can be explained, among other factors, by the investigative interest in continuing the value-based analysis of depicting church in Russian mass media. Previous investigation⁴⁷ has shown that, generally, Russian mass media pay now much more attention to such concepts of religious discourse as blasphemy, divine grace, as well as to the concepts of secular discourse including cultural memory, sanctuary, and national wealth. The church has been studied as “a special type of religious organization, a congregation of adherents of that or another religion established on the commonality of religious doctrine and cult”⁴⁸. Based on the results of the analysis, the authors have found a junction plane of political and religious discourses in modern mass media, which proved to be culture. Within the framework of current analysis, the church appeared to be one of the actors in the political space of Ukrainian conflict, confirming the previous conclusions that the change in the political dimension of the church discourse is interwoven into general mass media discourse. It was not unexpected that the category of church proved to be more than once associatively linked to other ideas under investigation.

The final result of analyzing journalistic understanding of this concept is rather ambiguous: the idea itself was mentioned by only one publisher (Ogonyok), however, its usage appeared to be more frequent as compared to other categories under investigation (46 references). Alongside the expected associations in the spiritual plane (“repentance”, “values”, “freedom”, “help”), the church appeared to be associated with risk, opportunities, destruction, separation, etc. “In modern era, when the church has gradually lost its influence on the society as a result of secularization, its practice is now reduced to satisfying the

religious needs of separate individuals and to preserving Christian values”, maintains one of the academic edition⁴⁸. However, in Russian mass media covered by this analysis, including Ogonyok, the church presents itself as an institution engaged not only in safeguarding Christian values but also in protecting the state system. The church is seen as a socially meaningful power that can be addressed by the political powers of society.

However, the previous study developed by V. Sidorov and K. Nigmatulina⁴⁷ in 2014, showed that there was no single media code that could describe the relationships existing between the church and the power, between the church and the wider social groups, between the church and secular culture. New analysis confirmed the conclusion that the presence of church in the mass media space is controversial, if not extortive for most part of the audience. In this case, it is not possible to undertake any comparison with West European or American investigations in the sphere of the mass media discourse on religion and churches, as a positive interpretation of Christian churches’ information policy dominates overwhelmingly in those countries. For example, Lee Marsden and Heather Savigny have analyzed Catholic Church activity in terms of international relations, having highlighted a certain importance of Vatican and its mass media projections in solving global conflicts. In Russia, Orthodox Church is rather known to instigate conflicts in the mass media environment, being confined within the limits of internal politics of the church and the state.

Thus, the value status of such category as “church” (in contrast to religion) proved to be the most unstable in modern media environment as compared to all other categories. This has been stipulated by the lack of a single actor, affecting the framing in the church discourse.

Interestingly, if compared to war and power, the idea of crisis have taken quite a modest share of references in the texts dedicated to Russian-Ukrainian subjects in the magazines under investigation (Russian Reporter has 0; Ogonyok accounts for 33; Profile makes 83). Confident associations with economical categories are mixed with such humanity associations as “enmity”, “civilization”, “suffer”, “humane”. Unambiguously negative connotations do not coincide with rather neutral interpretations of the dictionaries that are limited by principal, although, incomplete characteristics of the crisis: “rapid, drastic change in something”⁵⁰. In the articles of the magazines under investigation the ideas of “turning point” and “stagnation” (the latter also being treated according to

academic dictionaries) exclude each other in principle; however, not unexpectedly, they introduce to the texts the category of control. Here, as well as in the previous sections of the analysis, the undertones of unpredictability and “abruptness” are washed out of such concepts as “war”, “revolution” and “crisis”.

It should be noted that selecting the heated conflict in Ukraine as a starting point for the investigation was probably the main reason that did not allow studying the category of crisis comprehensively, inasmuch as exactly this “conflict” proved to be at the media front line. Indifference toward the idea of “crisis” and toward the associated notions of “crisis” phenomena has been stipulated by the fact that over the last 25 years both political and social instability became a normal state of the system in principle, thus to a large degree predetermining the vocabulary of the mass media in the part dealing with crisis. Researchers note that having a good command of the language of crisis is an indicator of its soon resolution. Martin Lodge and Kai Wegrich highlight that constructing the crisis narrative finally affects the real state of affairs⁵¹. From this viewpoint, the lack of crisis rhetoric in Russian mass media can be an indication of the struggle against the situation itself, focused on deleting the long-term memory about the hard times of the recent past and on reconstructing the rhetoric into a positive narrative.

Presently, a trend is observed in the mass media to transit from the conceptual value instability toward value distinctness and parochialism, which is manifested through marking the key categories of social and political discourse with either unambiguously positive or unambiguously negative tags.

Up to now, the discussion was dedicated only to the contents of value changes in the mass media discourse, and no current conditions or factors have been touched upon. However, to obtain an objective estimation of the whole process, it is vital to address the determinants of the political meaning dynamics in the mass media. In this regard, it should be noted that it is exactly the social and political reality that directly affects the changes in value meanings of the categories in social consciousness, including the consciousness of the journalists. Such is an objective side of the issue. In the subjective plane, journalistic interpretations of political meanings are also noted for their value-related instability. It is, for example, quite clear, why the same people are at the same time “separatists” and “rebels” for different parties of the Ukrainian conflict, the polarity of journalists’ attitudes reveals itself.

However, more subtle explanations would be required for the variations of meaning in the mass media used by one party of the political conflict.

Thus, such new geopolitical toponyms as Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR), Lugansk People’s Republic (LPR) can be represented in Russian mass media as either self-proclaimed DPR and LPR or the so-called Donetsk and Lugansk Republics, or Novorossia, or without any meaningful specifications at all. All of them, although indirectly, are value-based, because these geopolitical names, that came to exist just yesterday, signify the competing socially meaningful ideologies with associated evaluations of the events that take place in the world of politics, with their value foundations, around which these new toponyms have been created. Of course, that or another word usage testifies of either official or non-official status of a certain mass media organization, of the author’s perception of political events. Nevertheless, the value-related instability of the meaning interpretation in the mass media is especially associated with a journalist’s ambivalent capacity of emotional understanding of the analyzed subject. Emotional understanding of the world is the highest manifestation of professional skills of a journalist, who meets “the event as an outburst” and who integrates this event “on-line”, and the subject of the journalist’s interest undergoes subjective grading based on the most important value foundations: “positive – negative”, “beautiful – ugly”, “good – evil”. All the interpretations that follow form an inseparable part of the journalistic understanding of the world.

Understanding in journalism is confined by the parameters that could be subdivided into the dictated and the attained ones. Dictated parameters are represented by observation skills, propensity to imaginative thinking. The attained parameters are the professional skills and value foundations of a personality, world outlook. The dictated and attained parameters in journalism form the integrity of the understanding journalism that is not just a natural trait of a journalist; however, it should by no means be perceived as an exclusively social derivative. In fact, this is a journalist’s emotional ability to “catch” momentarily the life composition in politics and economy, in culture and in everyday life. Life composition means that a journalist always and everywhere tracks the human origins and understands them in his own manner. However, his understanding of the world is not the same thing as journalistic interpretation. It should be remembered that Paul Ricoeur differentiates the ideas of “interpretation” and

“understanding”: he associates interpretation with understanding the written text, while understanding is related to perceiving the sense of signs in general⁵². At the same time, “understanding is connected with interpretation, it implies construing, and vice versa. Therefore, one more procedure should be identified, namely, explanation that is dedicated to describing the existing objective reality and is aimed at ensuring adequacy between the knowledge and the objective properties of the investigated subject. Understanding is identical to explanation. Understanding forestalls, accompanies and accomplishes the processes of explanation”⁵³. Hermeneutics makes it reasonable to assume that in journalism, the process of explaining the world includes its understanding as construing the facts of life according to journalistic knowledge of the subject of the mass media reflection. The procedure of journalistic interpretation primarily deals with the facts that became the part of the journalist’s internal culture developed in the course of his socialization. In simple words, the things that a journalist learned before passing university examinations are later transformed by the journalist as required; besides, the results of his own emotional perception of life are understood and explained. In each cognitive process an important part is played by value foundations of a personality, by the journalist’s world outlook, stipulated by his natural intuition. All this helps observing the mechanism of dynamics in journalistic understanding of the world.

Emotional perception in journalism represents a type of specific manifestation of anthropic principle that is heterogeneous in its structure. Within its structure, the following levels could be identified: physical perception of the world (human beings, events, phenomena), triggering powerful emotions; scientific perception of the picture of the world, that includes a priori explanations of such fragments of this picture as human actions, details of events and phenomena without any special proof; value-based and rational interpretation of the meanings of the world: human personality, implications of events and phenomena.

Conclusion

This study proceeded from the assumption that within the framework of the mass media practice some type of “scissors” is formed between the culture-filtered academic knowledge about a subject and the representation of this subject in a journalistic creative work. “Scissors” are formed as a result of dynamics of meaning in the mass

media, addressed by a journalist in the course of performing his creative activity. New meanings differ from the established academic ones. This is applicable, in the first place, to such generalizing ideas of political life as war, revolution, freedom, etc. On these grounds, a hypothesis has been suggested that journalism could exercise anticipating understanding, and this hypothesis was supposed to be confirmed by the results of the undertaken investigation.

The study applied the methodology of value-based approach to media analysis, therefore the empiric facts from the sample of the articles published in such magazines as *Russian Reporter*, *Ogonyok* and *Profile*, and the academically established definitions from dictionaries and encyclopedias were studied from special value-oriented prospective.

The results of the accomplished analysis show that the dynamics of meaning in the mass media have been confirmed in all aspects of the sample: first, in sampled publications from each magazine under study; second, which is most important for the final results of the investigative project, in each idea selected for measuring the dynamics of meanings. The obtained results can be used as the basis for the theory of understanding in journalism.

However, the discovered parameters of dynamics for each investigated concept proved to be of different order: in some cases the gap between the new journalistic meaning and the established classical meaning was especially distinct, while in other cases the positive dynamics was less expressed or even became negative (confer the dynamics of meanings for concepts “war” and “law”). This means that the discovered phenomenon of the mass media dynamics of understanding the meanings in generalized interpretation admits the possibility of interpreting with an allowance for irregularity and ambiguity of this dynamics. Thus, the asynchrony should be perceived as an objective property of dynamics of understanding the meanings in journalism. It is assumed that the dynamics of meanings in journalism is directly dependent on the degree of abstraction of the idea under consideration; the more abstract it is the less opportunity is left to a writer to deviate from academic interpretation of the phenomenon and to come closer to his journalistic understanding, based on his direct perception of the facts of life.

A subject of analysis was represented by a selected group of magazines which social and political focus was characterized as liberal. At the same time, there is some dissimilarity within the sample: thus, *Russian Reporter* magazine approaches the editions of conservative char-

acter in many contextual aspects, which cannot be said about Profile or Ogonyok. This fact has been taken into account in the course of investigation. The above mentioned choice has two reasons. First, in one of those magazines (“Russian reporter”) an analytical article has been published dedicated to meaningful changes in social consciousness that have been occurring in the mass media in terms of transforming the actual political ideas over recent years. In a way, that article was an informational trigger for this study. Second, the magazines included in the sample are predominantly aimed at the educated part of the audience, and therefore, they finally may affect considerably the intellectual elite of the country and the political discourse in general. Based on the results of the study, different dynamics of meanings in the mass media was discovered, especially regarding such ideas as “crisis”, “church”, “freedom”. The more distinctly a magazine declares its social and political standing as liberal, the more priority is given to political economy, the closer are the relations between the new journalistic meanings and the ideas of the market economy. Not surprisingly, in “Russian reporter” the idea of freedom is associated with the idea of deprivation, as with certain costs to be paid by man for the right of freedom, in Ogonyok it is associated with the human right to think, with personal dignity, and in “Profile” it is associated with the freedom to sell.

To justify proper social theory of understanding in journalism together with the mechanism for transforming actual political meanings in the mass media, a profound investigation would be required that has been started by this project. First of all, the formation of samples should be proceeded with, assuming that the general sampling should be represented by social and political mass media in modern Russia. The sample should be enhanced moving gradually from one stage of investigation to the next.

Thus, it seems advisable that the press of conservative social and political character should be studied at the next stage of the analysis. The objectives of the new stage of the investigation can be formulated as not just searching for another important proof of the dynamics of meaning in the mass media or of its regular manifestation in all mass media, but as testing the hypothesis, according to which the dynamic characteristics of changes in the mass media directly depend on ideological and political standing of a publishing house. Further on, the sampling could cover popular newspapers, the news broadcasting and political shows on television, as well as such specialized editions as Literaturnaya Gazeta, Kultura, etc. Special aspects of pro-

spective investigations should include studying semantic substitutions in political discourse and finding more precise distinction between interpretation and understanding in the mass media.

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