

PhR 2019 Philological Readings

ENGLISH ANNOUNCEMENTS OF CULTURAL EVENTS: STRUCTURAL AND SEMANTIC APPROACH TO EXPRESSIVENESS

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of English media-discourse with the particular focus on the genre of an announcement. The authors define key parameters of media-discourse, systematize its functional and pragmatic characteristics, and consider its genre variations. Taking the premise that the announcement is a “borderline” genre, which joins the media and culture discourses, the authors describe the functional paradigm and highlight the dominant pragmatic functions of announcements. Thus, the persuasive function is considered to be the key one, being fulfilled through a high-level degree of textual expressiveness. Treating expressiveness as a semantic, emotive, and evaluative category aiming at strengthening vividness and imperative force of the text, the authors analyze the corpus of one hundred announcements of cultural events from the English quality papers websites, and identify the linguistic means of creating the expressiveness in a media-text. Further on, the density of these means per textual unit is measured and it is concluded that the high level of expressiveness is achieved through frequency of definite lexical means and syntactical patterns in the concise structural framework of the announcement. The authors define the main principles of content arrangement within the announcement and describe specific lexical and syntactical instruments of sustaining high-level textual expressiveness. The authors arrive at the conclusion that the primary role is played by emotive and evaluative lexical items as well as stylistic devices of both lexical and syntactical nature. The mechanisms of their interaction are thoroughly studied and their potential for enhancing the expressiveness of the media-announcement is revealed.

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Keywords: Announcement, expressiveness, media discourse, mini-text, structural approach, semantic approach.



1. Introduction

Announcements of cultural events represent a special genre of media-texts which possess two leading functions, namely informative and persuasive ones. The first one consists in informing as many readers as possible about the most significant social events. The second function which is highly prominent in media discourse is that of persuasion: the analysis of publicistic texts proves that they are characterized by an obvious bias and strong emotional charge, which are the result of the author's desire to exert pragmatic influence on the audience. It can be said that the persuasive function is systemic for media discourse, for it is this function which sets this style apart from all other forms of literary language. This leads us to the conclusion that thematic content of an announcement, which provides a condensed idea of a current cultural event, is preconditioned by the two main functions it performs. Such an announcement should instantly draw the reader's attention, make them interested and intrigued, and as a result impel them to visit an art exhibition or any other cultural event.

Another factor which defines the structural and thematic peculiarities of the text is the fact that an announcement belongs to the category of mini-format texts. According to the classical definition provided by Kubryakova (2001), a mini-format text is the one that possesses such characteristics as visual brevity, relative completeness and independence, nominal as well as pragmatic potential. Researchers of mini-texts of different genres invariably highlight the fact that the economy and brevity of form resulting in the concentration of content become of paramount importance here (Cherkunova, 2017; Cherkunova & Trenina, 2017; Gatina, 2016; Vedeneva, Kharkovskaya, & Malakhova, 2018).

In this respect, it can be said that the limited volume of the text brings about the key feature of an announcement revealing itself in the economy of verbal means, which, in its turn, creates additional stimuli for the realization of the textual pragmatic potential. As a result, the role of expressive means on both semantic and structural levels dramatically increases. The division of the unified linguistic category of expressivity according to the layers of its realization on the semantic and structural levels is thoroughly discussed by Potts (2007) and McReady (2014). In our previous studies we justified the conceptual approach to the language expressivity treated as an overarching category which encompasses a whole spectrum of means aimed at the expression of the feelings as well as the enhancement of the persuasive power of the utterance (Kharkovskaya & Starostina, 2014). Whatever makes the speech brighter, more effective and impressive is discursive expressiveness. Approached from this angle, the category of expressiveness becomes broader than both the categories of emotiveness and evaluativeness and incorporates them as structural elements.

2. Problem Statement

The significance of this research is determined by the need to address the problem of the linguistic parameters of English announcements treated as a specific type of mini-format media texts. It is necessary to describe the typical features of announcements which help them to successfully perform their functions and fully realize their pragmatic potential in terms of the category of expressiveness. The topic of the announcements of cultural events has not yet been thoroughly addressed: in particular, we have not managed to find any specialized studies devoted to this type of text. Neither structural parameters of the

English announcements nor their semantic components have been studied yet. What is more, the problem of the realization of the category of expressiveness, which is the key instrument in performing the persuasive function, has not yet been studied either. In particular, no contemporary research aimed at the discovery of concrete linguistic means of achieving a certain degree of expressiveness in the English announcements of cultural events has been made.

3. Research Questions

This article shows the results of a compound quantitative and qualitative linguistic analysis which incorporated the following items:

- What are the peculiarities of the announcements in terms of their structural variations? What role does the textual structure play in the realization of the functional paradigm? Is it possible to use information data for attraction?
- How great is the rate of properly linguistic expressive means in the announcements? Is there a direct link between persuasion being the key pragmatic function of the announcements and the frequency of the expressiveness means of both lexical and syntactical levels?
- Which concrete linguistic means contributing to the creation of the expressive plane of the text dominate on different language layers? Which means are supportive or optional? What is the role of stylistic devices in creating the expressive plane of the announcements the latter being traditionally the most expected means performing this function?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to define functional and pragmatic characteristics of English announcements of cultural events treating them as part of the media discourse, on the one hand, and a variation of the mini-format texts, on the other; to analyze the significance of expressiveness for the realization of the persuasive function being the key one for an announcement; to elicit the concentration of the linguistic expressive means per text; find out and systematize concrete structural parameters as well as lexical, syntactical and stylistic expressive means contributing to the creation of the expressive plane of the announcements as special type of media texts.

5. Research Methods

Methodologically and theoretically the research is based on the treatises concerning functional and stylistic peculiarities of contemporary media discourse (Aleksandrova, Aleksandrova, & Artamonova, 2015; Bell, 2001; Boushev, 2015; Dobrosklonskaya, 2016; Kalugina, 2014; Klushina, 2016; Lukoshus & Buzikina, 2016), the theory of mini-format texts (Cherkunova & Trenina, 2017; Cherkunova, 2017; Gatina, 2016; Kharkovskaya, Ponomarenko, & Radyuk, 2017; Kubryakova, 2001; Vedeneva, Kharkovskaya, & Malakhova, 2018) and the theory of linguistic expressiveness (Kharkovskaya & Starostina, 2014; Kovalenko, 2016; Telitsyna, 2016; Trubkina, 2017; Zagrayevskaya, 2015).

The research has been carried out on the material including 100 announcements of cultural events collected on the Internet-sites of 15 museums situated in England and Scotland with the help continuous

sampling method. The first stage of the research involved qualitative analysis of the structural components of each announcement which resulted in the description of the typical structural models of text organization. The second stage consisted in describing the linguistic means of creating the expressive plane of the texts, which were further systematized according to the language levels; the degree of their concentration per text was defined. The third stage involved frequency analysis of each expressive means, as well as the description of the most typical lexical units and syntactical models. Besides, in the course of the quantitative and qualitative discourse analysis the central, peripheral and optional linguistic components of the expressive plane of the announcements were defined.

6. Findings

Since the announcements belong to the group of mini-format texts, their structure is generally observable and quite simple, which allows to trace the peculiarities of their construction. In the majority of cases an announcement consists of 3-6 paragraphs, each of which has a topic of its own. The first paragraph is an introduction, most often consisting of one two-member composite sentence. Its purpose is to give a brief description of a coming event, provide some general information about it, for example: *One of Britain's most significant and controversial painters and sculptors, Maggi Hambling, exhibits a new series of ...*

After a brief introduction there comes the body of the announcement which consists of one or two paragraphs. The reader is provided with the facts from the biography of the artist whose works are on display which may be necessary for the understanding of their works. If the subject of the exposition is not a single artist and his/her works, but a historical event or a remarkable object, the body of the announcement provides the historical background or some important facts related to the subject of the exhibition, for example: *Music was one of the most popular themes in Dutch painting, and carried many diverse associations. In portraits, a musical instrument or songbook might suggest the education or social position of the sitter; in scenes of everyday life, it might act as a metaphor for harmony, or a symbol of transience.* However, information about the artist as well as historical background do not belong to the obligatory structural elements and are found in 75% and 25% of the texts respectively.

There is a tendency to provide in the main body of the announcements the information concerning the amount of pieces exhibited as well as to mention the museum and private collectors who contributed to the organization of the exhibition, as in the following example: *This exhibition brings together around 25 oil sketches. Works are drawn from the incomparable collections of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, New York, and Olana, Church's picturesque estate along the Hudson River, now a New York State Historic Site.* This information is present in 90% of the texts.

The closing part of the announcements is invariably a summary drawing a conclusion about the significance of the exhibition and predicting a possible emotional feedback of the viewer: *'Rembrandt: The Late Works', organised by the National Gallery, London and the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, offers you an opportunity to experience the passion, emotion and innovation of the great master.*

In some cases, this outward simplicity and neutrality of the body is compensated by the introduction of a quotation into the textual structure, which contains a bright and emotionally charged opinion about the event provided by a respectable printed source: *'Breathtaking' Metro, 'This show bursts*

with the vivid energies of work ripe for rediscovery.' *The Independent*. It is obvious that such opinions contain abstract nouns and bright positive adjectives which are aimed at creating the necessary emotional disposition and to lead the potential visitor to the required action. It can also be noted that all the quotations are italicized and non-linear in relation to the rest of the text, which draws the attention of the reader before they even read the text itself. However, only 30% of the texts are accompanied by such opinions from popular magazines and newspapers. As a rule, this structural element can be found in the announcements of the most prominent or much talked-of exhibitions.

The informative function of the announcements is realized first of all through the markers of factual information – proper names (including the names of the artist and the art galleries) and dates. In addition to that, terminological units related to painting, and to art in general, have a clear informative charge: *still-life, watercolours, figure-painting, lithographs, self-portrait, etching, impressionism, avant-garde, surrealist movement, etc.* At the same time, a great concentration of the names of great artists simultaneously performs the function of attraction, hence it can be treated as a linguistic means of creating expressivity on the discourse level. Since the announcements of cultural events are targeted at the prepared audience, that is people interested in the art of this or that period, some fact from the biography of the artist, the names of their most prominent works as well as the information about the impressive number of these works present at the exhibition undoubtedly contribute to attracting the audience's attention. Consequently, it is impossible to draw a strict borderline between the means informative and persuasive functions realization.

However, it is possible to single out purely expressive linguistic elements which considerably enhance the expressivity of the utterance and are aimed exclusively at the increase of the pragmatic potential of the announcement. The concentration level of such expressive means varies within the corpus of sample texts, but it is never lower than 5% or higher than 19%. The general frequency rate of the expressive means in the contemporary English enouncements can be seen in Figure 1.

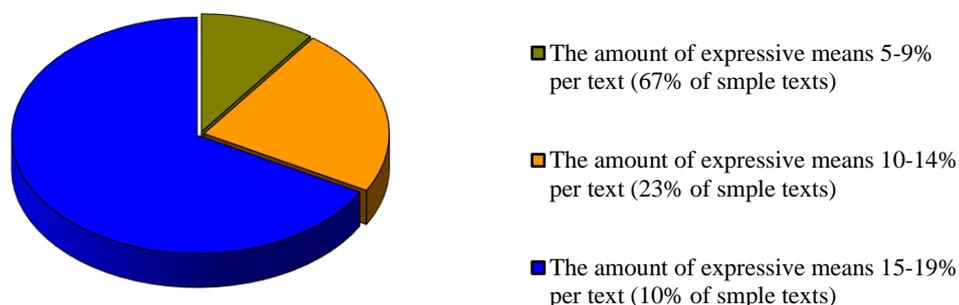


Figure 01. General frequency rate of the expressive means in the contemporary English enouncements

Linguistic means of the lexical level are an absolute majority compared to the means of other language layers. The key role in the enhancement of the expressiveness of an announcement is taken up

by positively charged evaluative adjectives. They have rather a high degree of straightforwardness, but vary in their semantic shades: *brilliant, spectacular, innovative, significant, powerful, outstanding, exceptional, etc.* Such evaluative adjectives are present in all the announcements and represent the most frequent expressive means. The second most important lexical expressive instrument is represented by the positively charged evaluative nouns, among which some special place is occupied by the word *masterpiece* which is a marker of the cultural discourse. Besides, other lexical units of different degrees of expressivity are present in the texts of announcements: *achievement, genius, beauty, grace, originality, enigma, success, passion*. The concentration of such evaluative lexical units in a small text can be very high, which leads us to the conclusion that the mechanism of using lexical means with a high degree of expressivity on the same level is the key one in terms of the effectiveness of the impact on the audience. It is also possible to single out some most frequent lexical units which are present in all the announcements and thus form the expressive center of the semantic plane: they are the adjective *major*, the noun *masterpiece*, the verb *enjoy* and the ordinal numeral *first*. These lexical units possess a high discursive potential, a high level of semantic expressiveness and, consequently, a high level of pragmatic influence on the recipient, which, in its turn, contributes to the utmost realization of the persuasive function of an announcement.

To a group of considerably less frequent means of creating expressiveness, which can be referred to the periphery of the expressive plane of an announcement, belong other positively charged evaluative verbs, such as *celebrate, experience*, as well as evaluative adverbs: *newly, rarely, famously, never before*. The intensification of the expressive lexical units in the sample texts is represented solely on the morphological level in the form of comparatives: *deeper (understanding), more diverse and emotionally considerate (practice)* and superlatives: *the greatest (images), the most radical and influential (artists)*, and it can also be referred to the periphery of the expressive field of the announcements.

The optional elements of the expressive field of the announcements are represented by the scanty syntactical models and stylistic devices. Expressive syntax is restricted to two models: firstly, these are imperative structures which are present in 20% of the texts. However, the cases of expressive syntax are always combined with the expressive lexical means and its main function is to enhance the motivating force of the announcement: *Experience the charm and sensitivity of Barocci's masterpieces – never before seen outside Italy*. The second expressive syntactical structure is represented by sporadic instances of interrogative sentences combined with ellipsis. These constructions imitate an interactive dialogue with the audience: *Inspired by the exhibition? Why not get involved with our events programme?*

Stylistic devices which could considerably enhance the expressivity and the vividness of an announcement are also represented by individual examples: a metaphor (*This major exhibition celebrates the love affair between the artist J.M.W. Turner and Italy*), an enumeration combined with alliteration (*wigs and war paint, marvelous moustache and mascara, nail polish and nose rings, earrings and eye-liners, beards and brill-crème, combs and curlers, tattoos and tooth powder*), an antithesis (*complex challenges and subtle nuances*), parallel constructions (*From a priest's daughter to a temple singer, a middle-aged man to a young child, a temple doorkeeper to a woman with a Christian tattoo*), and parcelling (*Desolate snowscapes. Dramatic stag hunts. Castle ruins. Tartan cloth. Highland cattle. Are these Victorian stereotypes of Scotland enduring and were they ever a fair representation of the nation?*).

Altogether, the tropes were only used in 5% of the sample texts, hence they cannot be considered as the central or periphery components of the expressive discourse level, but rather an optional element.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that the results of the analysis prove that the expressiveness of the English announcements of cultural events is materialized on the semantic level of lexical textual components, on the level of the sentences as well as on the level of textual structure. Most often, the structural pattern includes an introduction, a body containing the information about the number of the exhibits and some facts from the biography of the artist, a conclusion. An opinion about the event provided by a printed source or some background historical information, which can be included into the body of the announcement, are the optional elements of the announcement structure. This clear-cut and logical arrangement of the factual data contributes to the joint realization of informative and persuasive function of the text. This blend of informing and attracting is realized through the enumeration of the names of the artists combined with the intriguing facts from their biographies, as well as the amount of the exhibits on display.

On the lexical and syntactical levels expressiveness as an obligatory condition of the persuasive function realization is achieved by the quantitative parameters (the ratio of the expressive means per text) and the qualitative parameters. The latter include lexical units being a compulsory element which consists of central elements of the expressiveness field (positively charged evaluative adjectives and nouns), and periphery elements, such as expressive verbs and adverbs, morphological intensifiers. It is also possible to single out concrete evaluative lexical means, which are most frequently used. The supportive optional expressive elements include expressive syntactical models and tropes.

In general, it can be said that the announcements of cultural events are under the influence of such factors as expressive brevity as well as laconic and concise way of narration, which ensure both the economy of language means as well as the time required for the adequate understanding of the content.

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