

SCTCMG 2019
**International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural
Transformations in the Context of Modern Globalism»**

GENRE AND FORMAT: DIFFERENCE OF NOTIONS

Alena Kotaeva (a)*
*Corresponding author

(a) Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, 6, Miklukho-Maklay St., Moscow, Russia
alena-kotaeva@mail.ru, 89264316570

Abstract

The term “genre” was introduced into the professional lexicon of journalists long ago. The same refers to the term “format”. The meaning of each concept seemed intuitively clear and for the time being did not require special attention of neither theorists of journalism, nor linguists. However, suddenly it was revealed that the journalistic community faces some problems with its language practice: these concepts started competing. The word “format” sharply expanded the range of its meanings and began to push out other terms, including the “genre”, from professional vocabulary. Over seven years from the publication of the first longread the experts failed to reach agreement regarding the most relevant name for this term and to what category – a format or a genre – it shall belong. On the basis of the studied literature devoted to characteristics of a longread as a multimedia text the paper gives the definition of the longread and describes its characteristics. The paper covers such concepts as denotative and technical features of a longread; the process of such journalistic media texts. The author studies the theoretical basis of this Internet phenomenon and its practical application in media space.

© 2019 Published by Future Academy www.FutureAcademy.org.UK

Keywords: Genre, format, longread, journalism, media.



1. Introduction

In many respects the classification of journalistic genres is similar to the system of literary genres. In the middle of the 4th century BC Aristotle in his fundamental *Poetics and Rhetoric* proved the division of literature into genres depending on the reflection of reality (poetry – special type of lyrics, prose – epic, drama – dialogue). Continuing the traditions of literary studies and art criticism, the theory of journalism also studies kinds, types and genres of journalistic works. The reason of such division is the variety of types of public practice of a person, an incredible variety of the surrounding world and creative opportunities of its reflection.

Since it developed in the world practice of different kinds of work, the “genre” defines a particular kind of any work sort and its products. Each kind has stable primary features demonstrating objective factors bringing it into the world. The works of a portraitist or a landscape writer in painting, a song writer or a symphonist in music, a fictionist or a novelist in fiction, a reporter or an analyst in journalism are the examples of any work type. Their main characteristics are reflected in the corresponding genre. It can be said that a genre is the concept of the theory of creativity transferring the specifics of creativity of a certain type. Therefore, it is always concretized in its name with the reference to this type of work or its product. For example: Isaac Levitan – an outstanding Russian painter whose works were made in the landscape genre; no one could compete with Georgy Sviridov in the genre of a symphony; Guy de Maupassant was not only a famous novelist, he also left a brilliant heritage in the genre of a short story; Vasily Selyunin – one of the greatest analysts of the Soviet journalism worked only in analytical genres, and many of his materials were similar to scientific articles.

2. Problem Statement

Different scientists give different interpretations to the genre in journalism. It is noted that in the theory of journalism the concept “genre” is strongly pushed out by the concept “text” (Kroychik & Korkonosenko, 2000). However, unlike text the genre implies more rigid determinancy bound to the properties of a described or analyzed fact, editorial purpose, personal features of the author. Lazutina and Raspopova (2011) understand “genre” not so much as a certain structural and denotative form, but as a certain sort of work characterized by sustainable features not only at the level of a work product (text), but also at the level of a work method. Duskaeva (2012) who analyzed the dialogical nature of publicistic texts thinks that the classification of newspaper genres is based on the dialogical model of communication. Nevertheless, in journalism the genre is most often understood as a certain text structure having specific regularities and typological characteristics. A famous Russian researcher in the field of the theory of genres Tertychny (2006) points to the interdependence of form and content as fundamental components of journalistic genre: “Journalistic genres refer to stable types of publications united by similar denotative and formal features” (p. 38). The above confirms that a genre is an integral unity of content and form, which functioning is triggered by such object and subject categories as real, historically contingent reality, direction and specialization of publication, personality of the author.

The theory of journalism has a traditional system of genres. Most often they are divided into information, analytical and literary-publicistic genres.

Genres changed and transformed as the history was evolving, but at the same time they maintained their continuity and stability. According to Bakhtin (1994),

a genre is always the same and yet not the same, always old and new simultaneously. Genre is reborn and renewed at every new stage in the development of literature and in every individual work of a given genre. A genre lives in the present, but always remembers its past, its beginning. Genre is a representative of creative memory in the process of literary development. (p. 27)

The concept “format”, as it is understood at present, is mostly used to specify a set of features typical for any subject of communication if the later one is understood as the information product addressed to the audience. In the conditions of market relations these features form a set of criteria, according to which it corresponds to other subjects of communication to define its commercial consistency. Thus, we can conclude on the possibility or impossibility, expediency or in expediency of presenting this work to the audience. Just as the area, volume and form of objects define their place in the real world, the format defines the place of information products in the course of communication, in the course of their movement across the information market. Therefore, it can be said that the format is the concept of communication studies characterizing the place of a communication subject in information flows addressed to the public.

Since different genre models of journalistic works get to information flows, they can also be considered from the point of view of a place, which they shall take in communication channels on the basis of their semantic or formal characteristics. Hence, there is overlapping of the scope of the “genre” and the “format”. It seems possible that now you can express yourself without the risk of not being understood: “We definitely need a text in the format of a report on this page”, on the one hand, and “Today the genre of the report in journalism occurs in several formats”, on the other hand. Different meanings turn to be intuitively clear.

As we see, not one and the same concepts are defined by “genre” and “format”. It may safely be said that they do not duplicate each other.

3. Research Questions

The major dictionary meaning of a “format” is attributed to linear characteristics of printing forms or photo and cinema products, i.e. to their external parameters, mainly size. What was the reason for changing the semantic field of a word? Is this change natural and is caused by objective circumstances or is it provoked by accident which can be neglected?

The analysis of the current situation shows that there are objective circumstances leading to the expansion of the semantic field of the concept “format”. In any case some of them are perceived with certainty.

One of the circumstances includes the development of globalization processes in the modern world if understood as the demonstration of universal regularities defining the existence of the Earth. The key aspect of these processes is sharply increased meaning of communications in the information sphere. Satisfactory solution of problems inevitably arising in public life in the course of globalization (let us take for instance a recent economic and financial crisis) directly depends on the quality of mass information

flows on the globe, on the degree of their adequacy to the displayed world and saturation of humanistic values, their availability for development by different layers of the audience. The need for the optimum organization of mass information flows in such conditions should include a tool balancing the diverse content – texts of different kind, different type, different size.

Another circumstance of causal property includes technical abilities serving prerequisites to intensify communication. This was the time for new communication technologies which considerably changed the condition of information space. Computer networks became the communication channel where two layers of mass information “met” and began to coexist: the one that appeared spontaneously in the society and is spread by masses in the same manner, and the one that is created by specialists in mass information texts satisfying certain standards and focused on a particular part of mass audience. Under current conditions the journalistic community is required not only to ensure accurate genre organization of texts, but also accurate organization of their presentation to the audience. In this regard there is also a need to compare texts in terms of various perspectives, to classify parameters, to define the preference criteria to any work in compliance with conditions.

At last, one more circumstance – existence of the information market inevitably generating the commitment of mass media to commercial success as a guarantee of their stable existence. The criteria of economic success are supplemented with another measurement, which shall inevitably be fixed within a concept.

It seems that the considered circumstances served as factors that caused the expansion of the range of meanings of the concept “format”. Today the journalistic practice utilizes its several applications. The following are the most distinct:

- format in its initial meaning as a set of external characteristics of a subject of communication transferring its size and features of a form;

- format in the meaning of the “publication type” – here typological characteristics of the publication, mainly its concept, act as the criteria of compliance, on the basis of which the submitted texts are accepted or rejected (“We cannot accept this material, it is not our format. The concept of our newspaper has a different focus”);

- format in the meaning of the “work sort” – here the features of affiliation of work to a given sort of work act as the criteria of compliance (“We publish the collection of publicistic texts, and you offer a scientific article. It is an absolutely different format!”);

- format in the meaning of the “type of work” – genre features of the material become the criteria of compliance (“This is a news page, and you offer three materials of a different format. Why on earth shall we put here an essay on architecture?”);

- format in the meaning of the “type of communication channel” – features of suitability of sign systems where the work is objectified to successful distribution via this communication channel, act as the criteria of compliance (“Radio accurately distinguishes between musical and talk formats”, “Your story is not bad, but it takes at least 40 minutes to read it. Is it really a television format?”);

- format in the meaning of the “way of presenting” – properties defining the suitability of work for placement within the existing television and radio broadcasting network or graphic model of the publication

act as the criteria of compliance (“You need to change your material. Such “brick” without subtitles is not our format!”) (Lazutina, 2010, p. 16).

Summarizing the above we may conclude that the concept “format” does not serve an alternative to the concept “genre”, as well as it cannot be an alternative to the concepts “publication type”, “sort of work”, “communication channel”, “way of presenting”. It only incorporates a certain part of their concepts. This part acts as the measure of compliance of any information product to key features defining success in the information market of the set of products which it corresponds to.

When an information product goes beyond the required compliance, but represents axiological phenomenon, i.e. has value, its key features convey the status of a new format and become the criteria of compliance. Let us remember the story behind the *Kommersant*, let us remember the “column” – a format, which gave name to a new genre of our newspapers, let us remember the rise of talk shows on television. Today many other things can be added here. This makes it possible to assume that today the “format” does not only act as a tool to organize the structure of mass information flows for successful realization of any communicative strategy, but also undertakes functions of a tool to develop journalism in market conditions.

4. Purpose of the Study

What has a wider sense: a “genre” or a “format”? There is still a lot of debates concerning these concepts. The adherents of the classical theory of genres consider such discussions antiscientific and unproductive. Their opponents are not less categorical: they say a genre is an obsolete concept not suitable for the description of modern TV production.

5. Research Methods

One theory (based on the theory of “formula genres” by Cawelti (1996)) is that a genre and a formula are two aspects of an integrated literary process. The same can be applied to a genre and a format. The difference is that a “genre” is mainly connected with semantic characteristics of a program, while a “format” is defined by industrial characteristics: “packing” of content, adaptation, way of distribution, cost.

According to another version, a genre is one of the components of the format. To confirm this point of view Lashchuk (2010) highlights parameters defining a format of any media. For example, on radio the format of a station is expressed in its musical features, work features of a radio presenter, news, information and advertising releases. Lashchuk (2010) concludes that in audiovisual media the elements of the content can be created according to any genre, while duration, sequence, quantity, and style of presenting these elements will define a format. The same is also applicable for printed media: headings, sections are filled with materials prepared according to certain genres. But then the volume, sequence, amount of material, its arrangement within a column set a format.

Kemarskaya (2004) thinks that the format includes the features of a genre. In terms of a genre, we unite the groups of works into one on the basis of their commonality. In terms of a format, we highlight the uniqueness of a certain work, existence of its typical features.

Regarding the elements uniting the considered concepts, it is possible to note that a genre and a format perform similar functions of nonverbal dialogue with the audience. A genre reflects the author’s

idea of a subject, a format is developed according to psychological patterns of the audience. “A format is some kind of a market agreement between a producer and a viewer, while a genre is a tacit bargain between the author and the expectations of a viewer”.

The main difference between a “genre” and a “format” is expressed by the degree of stability of their features: invariable within a genre and variable within a format. According to Novikova (2010), “television formats constantly find themselves in the condition of reformatting and borrowing of features, approaches and methods of influence from other performing arts” (p. 59), a genre is more static.

6. Findings

Over seven years from the publication of the first longread the experts failed to reach agreement regarding the most relevant name for this term and to what category – a format or a genre – it shall belong. Those researchers who call longread a journalism genre believe that a multimedia component is not a postulate for this phenomenon. According to Kolesnichenko (2010), “a longread will remain a longread even if the material will only represent a text without any illustrations” (p. 83). He notes that the main genre typical for a longread is “the consistency of a topic (a new phenomenon, system investigation), an in-depth and long study of a topic by a journalist using various sources of information and a large volume of text in combination with high density of meaning and claim for exhaustiveness of the topic, complexity to develop a topic further than an author did” (Kolesnichenko, 2010, p. 93). Nevertheless, according to Bulaeva (2010), a text component of a longread together with multimedia platforms

is formed into a certain structure, gets new forms within the sign systems of the Internet and makes it possible to characterize a longread as a format of universal journalism. Unlike a genre, which is defined by denotative characteristics, of the material, a format mainly characterizes structural features of a media product. (p. 73)

In her reflections on the format of a longread Lazutina (2010) gives several definitions, of which the most suitable is the first one – a format as a set of “external characteristics of a subject of communication transferring its size and features of a form”. In fact, in their form and size longreads really differ from other journalistic media texts: we understand right from the term that the volume of this type of material is much more than the majority of other materials (longread – long read).

7. Conclusion

The study of scientific literature made it possible to define a longread as a special format of the journalistic text representing the volume material analyzing high profile incidents, unusual phenomena of the reality, acute pressing problems. A longread is located strictly linear down and is mount on a special platform; it allows a reader to plunge deeply into a topic due to its content and multimedia elements. A longread is characterized by the following:

1. Uniqueness of a topic: stories connected not only with resonant events, but also with unusual objects of reality, surprising destinies make the focus of a new format.

2. Depth of study: variety of sources of information, opinions.
3. Analyticity and artistry: a reader is tired of monotonous narration; he needs more entertainment.
4. Multimedia elements: unity of photos, video, infographics, sounds and text ensure the success of snowfalls.
5. Linear arrangement down: a user only needs to use a mouse, and in response to its action numerous illustrations, video, audio, 3D-panoramas are automatically loaded on the page.
6. Arrangement on a separate platform: a reader shall get into an absolutely different world without being distracted by advertising, tags, headings, emblems. Its choice is very important since the functionality of the platform defines the layout of the material.
7. Volume: longread cannot be less than 15 thousand signs. We put the volume last since not each long text can be considered a longread (Lukina, 2010).

In the course of the study we discovered different types of longreads and classified them according to their purpose:

1. Historical – the objective of such longreads is to reconstruct past events. Generally, such longreads are written in a genre of a chronicle. But sometimes the authors try to find the reason of the event and tell about consequences that confirms the analytical level of the material. For example, *Post-Olympic Depression Syndrome* (Kommersant.ru), *World War I* (Lenta.ru) and *Hell of Beslan. An Outward Glimpse* (AIF).
2. Chronicle – the main objective of such longreads is to make a reader feel that he was in the center of described current events together with the authors. A journalist here is a mere story-teller. In terms of their genre such longreads represent a story, a report, an event sketch. For example, *Magas is Coming* (Kommersant.ru).
3. Problem – the authors initially set the objective to find answers and solutions of the analyzed problem. Such longreads are generally written in the analytical genre: article, review, comment, analytical interview. For example, *Crimen Tatar Ego* (Kommersant.ru), *Planet of Masters* (Lenta.ru) and *Digital world of Money* (AIF).

Describing these judgments, the author of the paper does not urge to consider them as an ultimate truth. The paper only provides one of the possible theoretical versions. New versions and new systems of arguments are not excluded; they are rather interesting in the context of the general focus on the conventional solution of the above problem.

References

- Bakhtin, M. M. (1994). *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Kiev.
- Bulaeva, M. N. (2010). Multimedia longread as a new journalistic format. *Journalistic year-book*, 4.
- Cawelti, J. G. (1996). Study of literary formulas. *New literary review*, 22.
- Duskaeva, L. R. (2012). *Dialogical nature of newspaper speech genres*. St. Petersburg State University: Department of Philology.
- Kemarskaya, I. N. (2004). *Dramaturgy of electronic media. Study manual for students of higher educational institutions*. Aspent-press.
- Kolesnichenko, A. V. (2010). *Longreads in modern Russian press, iss. 1*. Moscow.
- Kroychik, L. E., & Korkonosenko, S. G. (2000). *System of journalistic genres. Fundamentals of creative activity of a journalist*. St. Petersburg: Knowledge.

- Lashchuk, O. R. (2010). Term “format” in mass communication. *Bulletin of Moscow University. Ser. 10. Journalism, 10*, 34–37.
- Lazutina, G. V. (2010). Genre and format in terminology of modern journalism. *Bulletin of Moscow University. Ser. 10. Journalism, 6*, 14–20.
- Lazutina, G. V., & Raspopova, S. S. (2011). *Genres of journalistic creativity. Study manual*. Moscow: Aspect Press.
- Lukina, M. M. (2010). *Internet mass-media: Theory and practice: Study manual for students of higher educational institutions*. Moscow: Aspect Press.
- Novikova, A. A. (2010). Hybridism as a determining feature of television format. *Bulletin of Moscow University. Ser. 10. Journalism, 10*, 58–65.
- Tertychny, A. A. (2006). *Genres of periodicals*. Moscow: Aspect Press.