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**THE INDEXATION OF PRECEDENT TEXTS IN MASS MEDIA:  
RAISING THE ISSUE**

Constantine A. Klochko (a)\*

\*Corresponding author

(a) Candidate of Philology, Associate Professor, Head of the English Language and Intercultural Communication Department, Perm State National Research University, 15, Bukireva str., Perm, Russian Federation, [konstklochko@gmail.com](mailto:konstklochko@gmail.com)

*Abstract*

The article delineates some issues connected with previously conducted research on the intertextual game with culturally and socially prominent texts in the media which is on the one hand said to have purely aesthetic meaning, and on the other – used only for achieving pragmatic goals. In this article the author raises the issue of the indexation of these texts that are commonly known as ‘precedent’ in Russian linguistics – quotations, proverbs, names, etc. The procedure is to be carried out to understand whether the first or the second thesis is true which might sound speculative without any figures. Above all this indexation can help define communicative and pragmatic value of the precedent text used in the intertextual game for the needs of journalism and media industry. The given article focuses on the first three steps of the generally planned research leading to working out methods for the indexation and is based on the examples of precedent texts from Russian quality newspaper headlines. These steps include manual selection of examples; their qualitative and quantitative evaluation; the validation of their recognition through the questionnaire to find out the primal list of mostly recognized phrases. It was discovered, that mainly proverbs, and sayings are on the list – both in the selection from newspapers and in the top-recognized examples from the questionnaire. Now morphological and syntactical features of this material should be studied at the next stage to process it then through the system of grapho-semantic modeling to reach the final goal of the research.

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## 1. Introduction

The topic of the given research is based upon the issues raised in the article (Klochko, 2018) dedicated to the usage of intertextual signs in media texts. The author delineates the problem of culturally and socially prominent texts, which are widely used in media, but their pragmatic objective doesn't seem to be clear in many cases. It is said that numerous examples of a word play and intertextual game in media mainly have purely aesthetic aims (Funikova, 2016, p. 37); the word play including allusions to other texts is more a 'thing-in-itself' (*Ding an sich*), rather than a literary technique used for a definite pragmatic purpose.

This article develops some aspects of the raised question – the problems of qualitative and quantitative indexation of prominent (the so-called 'precedent') texts attempting to solve the problem referred to in Klochko's (2018) article.

## 2. Problem Statement

The phenomenon of using intertextual signs through allusions to well-known, prominent texts is typical for oral speech when the speaker doesn't want to sound 'dull' and wants to entertain both oneself and the interlocutor (Funikova, 2016). Today media communication in many cases seems to be very close to day-to-day oral communication due to the fact that electronic devices broaden the sphere of this type and style of communication. Though intertextuality studies have always tended to take into account only literary works as well as the Holy Bible, myths and folklore (Hudolei, 2015; Vysochina, 2016; Golubtsov & Luchinskaya, 2018), contemporary texts of mass-media use allusions to the so-called precedent texts. This fact should be taken into account while conducting any research on the topic for various quotations, outstanding / notorious tweets and blog posts, memes appear to be spreading fast in mass media.

The notion of a precedent text was introduced by Karaulov (1987), who defined it as a "notable text known to a large number of people in the society during some period of time. Such texts include prominent names, dates, fiction characters, quotations, events, etc. and often occur in this or that discourse" (p. 216). So, all abovementioned tweets and memes can be referred to precedent texts.

The term is not accepted in the English discourse chiefly because it's easy to confuse with legal term (precedent) which is scarcely represented in the Russian discourse due to the absence of such legal practice. The term 'precedent' referring to linguistics is widespread though not many Russian authors write about it in English. Here's an example of an article in English devoted to the topic (Evenko, Klyukina, & Shipovskaya, 2014).

In any case the stated question whether such kind of incorporation of precedent texts into mass media follows any pragmatic goals or is used only for entertainment is speculative because we lack statistical data. The answer now will be either this or that depending on the personal position of a researcher.

So, this paper provides a glimpse of initial research on the following idea – to initiate the procedure of indexation of precedent texts which will help answer the stated question as well as solve a number of other problems.

As the study of the whole procedure of indexation seems to be very huge, during the work it was divided into stages. This article describes stages I-III, while stage IV is to be implemented, grounding on

the findings received from the stage III results' analysis. Thus, stage IV will be described in the forthcoming article.

### **3. Research Questions**

The given article focuses on the first three stages of the research which are:

- I) The selection of headlines of quality newspapers in the Russian language.
  - II) The analysis of the quantity of the examples, initial splitting of examples into groups.
  - III) The analysis of the results of the questionnaire, which includes excerpts from the full list.
- It's critical to keep in mind the following notes to understand the questions correctly.

Stage I) includes the selection of newspaper headlines that use recognizable allusions to precedent texts – movies, fiction, sayings, etc. Puns upon words without any obvious allusions were not taken into account. Newspaper headings were taken as a source because they are easy to collect; they can be easily checked through search engines unlike tweets, comments, posts, etc., that also imply elements of precedent texts as memes for example.

At Stage II) the chosen examples were grouped and specified according to the text they cite in order to see the general picture of the quality and quantity of precedent texts to which the selected headlines refer.

Stage III) was aimed at measuring the feedback (recognition of disguised precedent texts) on a number of examples from the selection. The examples were taken randomly but in such a way, that the questionnaire would include equal number of examples from each group. All the examples were carefully shuffled.

At the next stage, not included into the article the research should deal with the findings discovered through the analysis of the outcomes.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Thus, the purpose of this article is to delineate the results of stages I-III, taking the results of the latter as the starting point for the forthcoming stage of research (IV).

The recognized examples of precedent texts, often paraphrased in headlines, are considered to be speech patterns, easily attributed to a certain text, culturally or socially prominent. Such speech patterns are referred to as 'intertextemes' (Sidorenko, 2002, p. 317). Recognizable intertextemes are to be marked out in terms of their morphological and syntactical features that enable the person to trace the given text to this or that precedent text. For example, such headline as "Some Like It Cold" will be easily recognized by the percipient as the reference to the film "Some Like It Hot".

So, the projected result of the research given in the present article is the representation of a primal list (corpus) of phrases easily recognizable as allusions to precedent texts. This list will be later on taken as a sample to assay the indexation of precedent texts

### **5. Research Methods**

Each declared stage of the research was tackled using appropriate methods at every sub-stage.

5.1. At stage I the selection of headlines was performed manually. As the source of material a number of Russian quality daily newspapers were chosen: “Kommersant”, “Novaya Gazeta”, “Trud”, “Izvestia” and a monthly magazine “Forbes-Russia”. All issues were taken from free online archives.

At this stage only printed versions of the newspapers were taken as they supposedly include more intertextual allusions than online media whose headlines are aimed (in many cases) at clicks, the so-called ‘clickbait’ headlines. Furthermore, the mentioned papers embrace middle-aged readers with higher education as the core audience (National Readership Survey, 2017; Club for Internet and Society, 2018). Consequently, the percentage of the sought-for headlines is higher. Besides, the stated type of audience would also enjoy the process of decoding the hidden meaning of the precedent text in the headline, thus playing a kind of an intellectual game with the author/editor.

As stated above, simply ‘catchy’ headlines including puns were not included into the selection. As a rule the heading was selected basing on the competence of the researcher, but in a number of cases search engines were used to check if there is any allusion or not, due to the fact that the heading looked ‘weird’, i.e. included stylistically or semantically alien elements as words and phrases.

5.2. At stage II all the headlines from the selection were split into groups. This operation was also performed manually in accordance with the general type of the original text – a novel, a saying, a slogan, etc.

After that the number of headlines in each group was counted and the groups were ranked by the number of examples in each one. This showed most and least popular spheres, whence precedent texts are drawn from.

The overview of the quality of the chosen examples for each group was also aimed at the display of most and least popular texts within one and the same group.

5.3. Stage III was introduced into the research as the results of the previous stage exposed only the representation of the authors’ view and erudition.

To confirm the alleged recognizability of the “popular” (according to the frequency of emerging in headlines) texts, obtained through the operations in stage II, the following procedure was accomplished.

A number of headlines from each group in equal percentage, both frequently used and not, were included into a questionnaire. It consisted of three columns – the one including a headline, and two empty ones. The respondents were asked to fill in each slot of the second column with the precedent text they recognize in the first column. They were also asked to write the origin of the recognized text – the Bible, a movie, a quotation, etc. If they did not see any allusion at all, though they were told that each of 50 examples contained a reference to some well-known text, they had to draw a dash in both empty slots.

The audience for testing the recognition (or any kind of feedback) of precedent texts was divided into two groups. Group A was contingently equal to the audience of the media under analysis, while group B was taken as a control group and represented by students aged 18-20. The number of people questioned was 20; nearly equal quantity of people from both groups.

After the questionnaires were collected and analyzed, we were able to point out a number of ‘intertextemes’ that are unanimously (more or less) recognized by both groups.

## 6. Findings

As a result of the conducted research the following results were obtained.

- 6.1. At stage I 308 headlines were selected from 105 issues of abovementioned newspapers. As a single issue contains approximately 20 articles, in total more than 20 000 headlines were analyzed.

The period of issue of the newspapers under analysis was June, 2018- December, 2018.

- 6.2. The classification of the selected headlines according to the type of the implicated precedent text showed the following results: 12 groups were initially formed, with the opportunity of similar groups' incorporation. The total number in the list below is 318, as some examples were traced to both groups.

1. Fixed expressions – 154 examples
2. Movies – 36
3. Prose – 35
4. Songs – 24
5. Poetry – 21
6. New political terms - 15
7. Slogans – 11
8. Series – 5
9. 1990s Russian realia – 5
10. Jokes and anecdotes – 4
11. Memes – 4
12. Opera / Classical music – 4.

There also were some examples that couldn't be attributed to any group from the list. These are some Soviet realia expressions (4, very dissimilar), a well-known beer brand, TV shows (2), a well-known notification in the public transport.

Generally, if we have a brief look at the precedent texts, 'concealed' in the list above, the contents may be described as follows.

"Fixed expressions" contain a large scale of text types where proverbs and sayings (28 items), as well as idioms (14 items) and different fixed expressions (85 items) were included. This latest group implies both people's expressions of different origin that exist in oral speech in casual stylistic register (65 items) and common Latin phrases (in Russian) (7 items), famous expressions from the Bible (13 items), etc. Fixed expressions of Soviet origin practically equal the number of "people's" and folk proverbs and sayings – 27 items.

"Movies" mainly contain allusions to the titles of foreign and Soviet/Russian films (found practically in equal parts). However, quotations from dialogues are taken from Soviet comedies directed by Leonid Gaidai ("The Diamond Arm", "Ivan Vasilievich: Back to the Future") or Georgy Daneliya (as a scriptwriter) ("Gentlemen of Fortune").

"Prose" and "Poetry" groups imply allusions to widely cited phrases from mainly classical Russian novels and poems studied at lessons of Literature at school – A. Pushkin (6 items), N. Gogol, A. Griboedov,

N. Nekrasov, A. Block, I. Bunin, A. Chekhov, etc. XX cent. Russian literature is represented mainly by M. Bulgakov (“Heart of a Dog”, “The Master and Margarita” – 6 items), I. Ilf, E. Petrov (“The Twelve Chairs” – 6 items). In cases when the book is not included in the curriculum it is the title which is mainly referred to as a precedent text. This is also true to foreign fiction as paraphrased “Pride and Prejudice”, “50 Shades of Grey”, “The Godfather” (also the movie), “1984” are quite often to be used in the headlines.

Allusions to A. Solzhenitsyn’s works were found 5 times which is not surprising as in 2018 the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birthday was celebrated. Thus, the index of cited phrases by Solzhenitsyn in 2018 should be higher in comparison to other years.

50% of “Songs” group allude to rock-music: 1980’s-1990’s Russian rock bands. Other 12 examples cite popular Soviet songs of 1920’s-1930’s (9 items) and songs from movies and by bards.

Interestingly, the group named “New political terms” appeared to be smaller than it should assumedly be, bearing in mind the growth of ‘hype’ and the spread of the Internet and devices. We supposed that due to the stated factors emerging phrases and keywords from political discourse would immediately drift from events and press-releases into media and rotate here. The political terms were not new, rather those, which stood the test of time – as V. Putin’s words (“It sank”) of B. Yeltsin’s famous greeting “Dear Russians!”

The same could be said about Internet memes, which were extremely rare to occur in the text. Perhaps it happened because of only verbal representation of original polycode memes that usually combine a visual component and a phrase.

The “Slogans” group can be practically equally divided into advertisement slogans (4 from 1990’s products including 1 social advertisement and 2 random) and 5 political (propagandistic) slogans of the Soviet time. All ads appear to be prominent as they were first to appear in post-Soviet Russia.

Mentioned series in the eponymous group mention only one modern series – “The Game of Thrones”. Others are “Charmed”, “The X Files” (twice), and “The Rich Also Cry”, which was one of the first Mexican TV series shown in Russia.

“1990s Russian realia” group includes phrases that appeared in day-to-day routine at that time – as “new Russians” for a new class of the rich, “Financial pyramid” (“Ponzi scheme” in English), “A Letter of Happiness” (“Chain Letter” in English). Some social slogans as “Pay the taxes and sleep well” were also included because the need to pay taxes on one’s own was completely new for most people at that time. The same can be said about instant beverages – “*Yupi* – just add some water!”

“Jokes and anecdotes” group implies references to popular (Anti)Soviet anecdotes. No other jokes of post-Soviet time were found.

It’s interesting to mention that 4 allusions to operas and pieces of classical music were found – 2 operas (“A Life for the Tsar” by M. Glinka and “Juno and Avos”, a popular Russian-language rock-opera), as well as “Passions” by Bach and “Peter and the Wolf”, a symphonic fairy tale for children by S. Prokofiev. All musical allusions of this kind are revealed through the reference to their titles that are quite common and can be known to people who are not interested in music.

6.3. The results of the feedback from the respondents demonstrate the following outcomes.

There is a definite cultural gap between the two groups. Group A (aged 35-55, Higher education) show the awareness of almost all disguised precedent texts, whereas group B (aged 18-20, students) showed little knowledge of many milestones of common and popular culture especially of the Soviet origin.

It's worth mentioning that group B recognized mainly new terms and memes as well as confused the origin of some phrases with latest popular media events and quotations. For example, the word "Shoker" (short for electroshock weapon) from a paraphrased 1990s' ad was once understood as a reference to Joker from DC Comics. The same can be said about an extremely popular 1980s' song "Skovannye odnoi tsep'u" ("Bound by one chain") by a Russian rock-band "Nautilus Pompilius". In a number of cases the students mistook it for a soundtrack from a 2008 Russian movie "Stilyagi" ("Hipsters" in the English release) where it was used alongside some other Russian rock songs.

Group A never made any confusions of the kind. If they didn't know the answer, they simply crossed it out. So, group A couldn't recognize references to other rock-songs and series (as "Winter is coming" from "The Game of Thrones" in the headline "War is coming?"). They also faced problems with recognizing not so widely spread phrases from fiction – "Moskva – Petushki" ("Moscow Stations" in the English version) for example, as it is not included into the school curriculum, while all other references to classical Russian literature were understood in all cases by them.

Though it might seem hard to find any common ground between groups A and B in this situation, the collation of the answers by both groups showed that proverbs, quotations and aphorisms are equally recognized by nearly all respondents if these phrases follow the criterion of being a 'word-of-a mouth'. It means that the phrase should be popular enough (frequently said, printed, etc.) to become unauthorized, to lose its origin. This is a general feature of a precedent text (Uzerina, 2009). For example, many quotations from "Gore ot uma" ("Woe from Wit") by A. Griboedov have become phrases easily confused with people's proverbs and sayings. Identically phrases from "The Twelve Chairs" were almost in 80% of cases recognized, sometimes as a mere 'saying'.

Many such phrases including those of Biblical or Latin origin were generally marked by respondents as 'known' without any awareness of the source or even mentioning any – the answers were mainly "a saying" or "a well-known phrase".

Amazingly, some fixed expressions of the Soviet origin appeared to be so resistant, that even students show definite awareness (perhaps unconsciously, without mentioning the source) of some Lenin's quotations, which are in fact propagandistic slogans from 1960s' posters attributed to him: "There *is* such a party!" ("Есть такая партия!" "Est' takaya partiya!"), "You are going the right way, comrades!" ("Верной дорогой идете, товарищи!", "Vernoii dorogoi idete tovaristchi!"). The same can be said about 1990's advertising slogans when the product is not manufactured any more.

All in all, it's obvious that precedent texts are easily recognized when they are repeatedly used in day-to-day speech (proverbs, sayings) or imposed on the people (as in case with propagandistic phrases or advertising slogans). The precedent text needs a deal of emotion to be memorized and survive years and decades and remain in a person's mental lexicon that can reflect one's view of the outer world (Vasilyeva, 2014; Belousov & Erofeeva, 2015).

So, at this moment it is clear that the material to deal with later on is presented by fixed expressions – mainly proverbs, sayings and other expressions that are common in everyday speech. They are

presumably used for making one's speech brighter adding ironical or humorous attitude to the subject of the speech using numerous quotations. This is the statement we started from.

Now the objective of the forthcoming research is to tackle the number of fixed expressions as intertextemes - phrases bearing definite morphological and syntactical features that allow them to be perceived and recognized as allusions to some culturally and socially prominent (precedent) texts. These intertextemes are to be studied to understand what makes this or that precedent phrase recognizable and to which extent it can be altered to remain so.

Only after that it will be possible to work out proper methods of indexation through the "Semograph" system, for example, which allows to conduct grapho-semantic modeling of text selections on a large scale – "from naming to the transformation of texts of different semiotic systems" (Belousov & Zelyanskaya, 2010, p. 25).

We suppose that by means of the mentioned system the aim of precedent text indexation can be achieved in the nearest future. Today we have found out that the material to deal with in this sphere is the corpus of fixed expressions with the core of people's proverbs and sayings.

## 7. Conclusion

In the given article the first phase of the indexation of precedent texts in mass media was described. The stated goal aims in general at answering the question whether the use of numerous precedent (culturally and socially prominent) texts in media is pragmatically relevant or satisfies only aesthetic needs of communicants. This can be achieved through indexation via, say, "Semograph", the system of grapho-semantic modeling thus ranking both frequency and the context of the phrase usage.

The given research phase consisted of three stages which were aimed at the disclosure of a primal list (corpus) of phrases to deal with at the next phase of the study when each phrase from this list will be analyzed as a morphological and syntactical model and after that uploaded to "Semograph".

Though it is often assumed that precedent texts are derived mainly from fiction (Hudolei, 2015; Kildyashov, 2015) or it may seem that Internet memes occupy a major part in media nowadays, the real state of things is quite different.

After the analysis of a number of Russian quality newspapers on behalf of their headlines – how many precedent texts could occur there and what type they would be referred to – it was found out that from 12 groups more than 50% of precedent texts are traced to various fixed expressions. 154 fixed expressions of different origin from total number of 308 found examples containing an allusion to a precedent text. Prose and poetry examples are nearly 5 and 7 times accordingly fewer in amount than fixed expressions. Well-known politicians' quotations occurring in media as well as memes were rather few and dated back up to 15 and more years. The same can be said about the majority of the cited texts (advertisements, slogans) which proves the fact that a truly precedent text should stand the test of time and 'get anchored' in people's mental lexicon. Amazingly, Soviet cultural and verbal legacy appeared to be very resistant even nowadays.

The conducted feedback (reaction on the text) from a number of students and professors proved that fixed expressions are mostly recognizable by both groups of respondents. This selection can be broadened

on account of including various quotations from literature, songs, etc., that seem to have lost their author from frequent use and become a 'people's saying' or 'something familiar' as the answers state.

Now, knowing the primal list of phrases to work with, it will be easier to proceed in the indexation of precedent texts in mass media. At this moment the aim is to work out the model of indexation and evaluation of precedent texts. Once the model is designed it will allow transmitting its principles on other media spheres – social networks, online issues, news aggregators and more.

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