

III PMMIS 2019
Post mass media in the modern informational society
"Journalistic text in a new technological environment:
achievements and problems"

ORTHODOXY AND THE WORLD WEBSITE AS AN EXAMPLE
OF MODERN RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

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Abstract

Study of religious media discourse is a relatively new line of linguistic research notable for its integrated approach and interdisciplinary methodology. The object of this research is the Orthodoxy and the World website media texts exhibiting heterogeneity, since they are made up of verbal and visual components. Modern religious media discourse is an exceptionally productive area for identifying current mechanisms of meaning making, speech creation, and pragmalinguistics emerging in the age of indisputable dominance of the Internet as a basic communications system. In view of the above trends in the religious media discourse description, the methodology for studying symbiosis and interplay between verbal and video visual components of its main creation, the Internet text, takes on a particular significance. The linguistic media discourse theory studies influence and manipulation in Internet communication, where it is not just the lexical level of the language but not to a lesser extent the phraseological level that plays a prominent part. In the presented study, we have identified the following defining features of the religious media discourse: communication task diversity, mass character, which does not rule out certain elitism of the audience, expressiveness of the lexico-phraseological linguistic means, intertextuality, primarily based on Holy Writ texts. Analysis of the Orthodoxy and the World website media content attests to the fact that religious discourse holds its legitimate place in modern linguistics.

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Keywords: Internet, mass media, religious content, religious media discourse.



1. Introduction

Modern journalism is justly compared to a mirror reflecting all world processes. With the development of new technologies, primarily in the media, with the prevalence of internet texts over paper ones, the publicity vector is targeted at the network space, which has a bigger audience and boundless opportunities. Within this context, contemporary linguists are shifting research focus onto studying the Internet text, the main creation of media discourse, “functionally dependent type of discourse, which is understood as a set of speech practices and speech activity products in mass communication in all richness and complexity of their interaction” (Dobrosklonskaya, 2014, p. 182).

Contemporary media discourse boasts a breadth of themes. Emergence and active distribution of religion-related materials is attributable to multinationality of this country and consequently, concentration of various religions. “Religious communication is the earliest type of human interaction, the pragmalinguistics and rhetoric whereof impose their attitude towards this occurrence as to a special type of discourse. <...> religious values permeate all areas of human activity” (Makarova, 2018, p. 369).

2. Problem Statement

The majority of Russians (79% according to the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and 71% according to the American Pew Research Centre (Skripunov, 2017, para. 15)) profess Orthodox belief; therefore, there is a need for a description of this kind of religious content. Orthodox journalism has officially existed since 1985; however, its peak of activity, including the web space, falls on the beginning of the 2000s. “The Church’s influence that started in the 1990s and continues to date, allowed Orthodox journalists and writing priests to create a fairly extensive media network represented both in the traditional printed media, and on television and radio, and the Internet” (Lomakina & Makarova, 2018, p. 182).

Hence, one can safely speak of the emergence of alternative journalism in the form of religious media discourse, the study whereof seems to be of immediate interest. Emergence of entirely new religion-related publications content- and style-wise in the Russian media may be attributable not so much and not only to freedom of speech in mass media, as to the ever-growing interest of our fellow citizens in the Orthodox Word. “Owing to <...> the emergence of Christian instructional, educational, exhibition, and particularly media projects, there arose a demand for a special analysis of this phenomenon in linguistics” (Makarova, 2018, p. 367).

3. Research Questions

Pravmir Web Portal: Mission, Content, Pragmatics

The Pravmir Web Portal (<https://www.pravmir.ru/>) that has become the object of our analysis, positions itself as a ‘daily web paper about how to be an Orthodox Christian today’. The portal started operating in 2004 having become by now one of the influential federal scale public and social web-based media. The portal traffic is very high: over 4 million unique users per month. The group of authors is

heterogeneous; they are bishops and academics, well-known journalists and experienced priests, psychologists and doctors, pedagogues and parents of large families.

Let us dwell on the website structure. It should immediately be noted that its content is continuously updated in keeping with the main topic of the day or present-day tasks. At the start, the user's attention is focussed on mercy – one of Jesus Christ's most important commandments ('Blessed are the merciful'). Thus, in the top left corner there is information on a charity called Pravmir, on the right is the word HELP in large print on an orange background (Fig. 01). Let us emphasise that all information related to helping your fellow man and accompanied by photo or video materials is set off by an orange background and distributed all over the publication homepage. Colour, according to Ufimtseva (2002), falls into the category of features of reality that come the man's way first, which makes it possible to speak of the page colour fill pragmatic component. At the top of the same page, one can read on the blue banner the so-called 'quote of the day' made in special white type and containing reference to the author or the source text. E.g.: 'He who shows kindness toward the poor has God as his guardian' (Venerable Isaac the Syrian, n.d., para. 17); 'He who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully' (2 Corinthians, 2017, p. 438); 'Looking for the mercy of the Lord, you shall show mercy to others' (St. Theophan the Recluse, para. 14); 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy' (Gospel of Matthew, 2017, p. 12). Typically these are popular bible quotes the theme whereof involves the idea of mercy. This banner features white doves since this meek bird is traditionally thought of as one of the early Christian symbols and is associated with the emergence of news.

Selection of colour, the iconic component, sometimes font, etc. are also explained by Christian symbolism, in other words, thereby Christian ideas are reflected in the Orthodox media content. The colour blue symbolises purity, this is the colour of heaven. For instance, in Christian culture, particularly Catholic, certain blue flowers are used for offering to the Virgin Mary, the Queen of Heaven, portrayed in a sky-blue cloak. White is traditionally considered to be the colour of purity and innocence and is customarily featured in white robes and white flowers. The dove is 'peace, purity, love, serenity, hope. A Christian symbol of the Holy Spirit' (Tressider, n.d.). It is known that Christianity accepts God the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. Thus, during the baptism of Jesus the Holy Spirit came down from heaven in the form of a dove, therefore the dove is God's beloved bird. For Catholics the dove is a symbol of purity, innocence, humility, tenderness, love, discernment, and prudence. In the Old Testament, it represents simplicity, harmlessness, innocence, meekness, artlessness, incubation, the soul of the dead. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit as the third hypostasis of the Trinity appears as a dove. First, this image appears in the description of Christ's baptism: 'And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him".' (Gospel of John, 2017, 1:32, p. 201; Gospel of Matthew, 2017, 3:16, p. 9). In the Church Fathers' epistles, the dove is also a symbol of the Holy Spirit, and what is more of Christ and the Virgin Mary. As a symbol of the Holy Spirit incarnation, the dove is present in the scenes of: the Annunciation, Baptism of Christ, Baptism of St. Paul, and the Miracle of Pentecost. The white dove, a saved soul that has been purified, is viewed as the antithesis of the black raven of sin (Dictionary of symbols, 2016).

The portal main sections remain unchanged and are also printed in white on a blue background: news, the church, man, society, science, culture, family, and multimedia.

From a cursory glance at the first page of the portal, it is clear that the website contains materials differing in information richness and form: news, articles, photo and video publications, media coverage, etc. The *Important Topics* line acts as a kind of site navigator helping to choose or start with the pressing or main information on the portal.

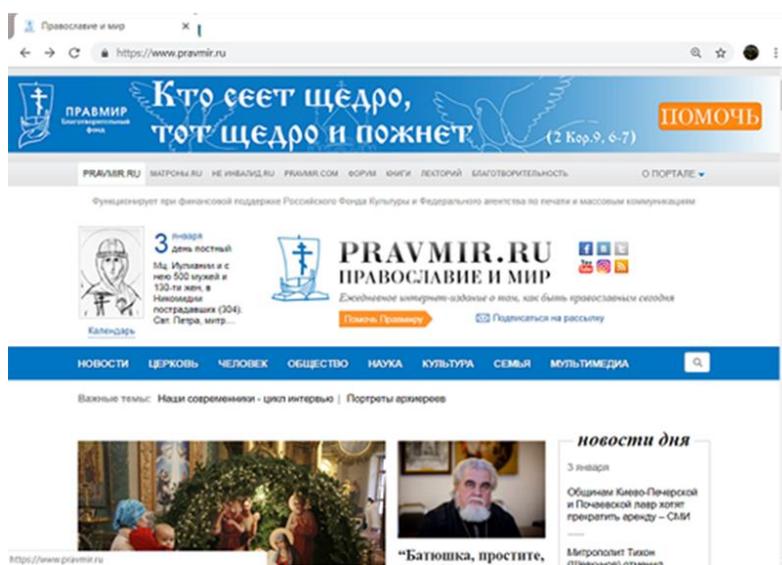


Figure 01. Home page of The Pravmir Web Portal

The publication policy strictly adheres to the portal's motto 'To believe means to act': social issues, moral and spiritual life, family values, issues of human and society life, education and medicine, cultural issues are discussed on a daily and systematic basis. News and analytical reviews, comments and interviews, audio and video materials, infographics and numerous subsites give wide coverage of various religious, cultural and social life events in Russia.

The website interface changes depending on the materials and topics released. All media texts have a concrete author / authors, sometimes it is specified which agency has provided this information. E.g. Press Service of the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia.

The Orthodoxy and the World web portal texts are an example of publicistic religious media discourse, since the materials amount to a polycode text having the 'nature of 2D or 3D projection, which involves verbal content and visual / audio-visual series analysis' (Lomakina & Mokienco, 2017, p. 247). These are authors' portrait photographs and media content – photos illustrating problems in question, special heading / subheading fonts, authors' names, publication date, special font and background or fill for a text containing the main points and what is of no small importance for the site users, font size icons, document print and email icons. All the above details once again confirm the presence of the media component of the Orthodoxy and the World portal materials.

4. Purpose of the Study

Review of the Orthodoxy and the World portal Publications

Let us review publications posted on the Orthodoxy and the World portal and quote the article headlines reflecting the website range of topics: ‘We Have Asphalted Our Soul and Have Mounted Barbed Wire over it’, ‘A Quarter of an Hour. And Where do We Put Stress?’, ‘Lack of Motivation and Knowledge – Why Children from Novokuznetsk are not Getting a Kidney Transplant’, ‘Each Has His Own Happiness, but Love is Complicated: How the Russian Family is Changing’. Authors highlight burning issues of the modern age through the use of expressive means (phraseological units, metaphors, etc.) as a strong position.

Presentation of articles starts with a heading, which is normally set in black bold type, an important Christian holiday, e.g. Christmas, can become the exception. In this case, the heading is printed in red to draw the reader’s attention to the calendar holiday. Under the heading is the author’s name set in grey, then a subtitle or a preamble helping guide the user.

The Article ‘*The Christmas Star is Always Shining – and it is Never Too Late to Join the Magi*’ as an Example of Religious Discourse Media Text

The Article ‘*The Christmas Star is Always Shining – and it is Never Too Late to Join the Magi*’ written by Pr. Andrey Mizyuk (<https://www.pravmir.ru/zvezda-rozhdestva-gorit-vsegda-i-prisoedinitnya-k-volhvam-nikogda-ne-pozdno/>) was released at Christmas. Being a media text, like all other materials on the website, it comes with a media component – the author’s photo, two illustrations featuring the Magi (Fig. 02) and the crucifix, the article preamble is printed in italics.

The Christmas Star is Always Shining – and it is Never Too Late to Join the Magi

PR. ANDREY MIZYUK | 7 JANUARY 2019



Figure 02. Visual component of the article

Let us proceed to the content analysis of the web portal publication in question. The media text strong position – the heading – contains the core statement because the publication is not about Christmas, but rather about Christ’s place in a man’s heart, in the life of each of us. Another strong position of the text, the ending, culminates in a rhetorical question ostensibly addressed to Jesus Christ, but in effect to the readership ‘*Yet again there was no place for you, O Lord?*’ In this fashion, the author calls on his reader to

give thought to the fundamental question of human life: what I live for, whether I live with God or without Him. This author's technique makes it possible to hold on to or steer the reader's mind on the right course when the article is already read.

A great number of nouns (precedent proper nouns inclusive), personal and possessive pronouns written with a capital letter (Christian tradition) is also a characteristic feature of Orthodox media texts: *Adam, Joseph, Scripture, Eden, Himself, the Divine Infant, His Mother*, etc.

One of the religious discourse particularities is the use of elevated vocabulary dating back to the Holy Writ texts: *uverovat'* (to believe), *skorbi* (afflictions), *obruchnik* (hoop-maker), *vozveshchat'* (to announce), *slozhit' v serdse svojom* (keep in your heart), *uvrachevat'* (to heal), *pogrebeniye* (interment), *rod lyudskoy* (human race), *padshiye lyudi* (sinful people), *pravednyy* (saintlike), *drevo* (tree), *prazdnyy* (idle).

Another particularity is a mixture of vocabulary of different stylistic registers, use of neologisms, which are more expressive, etc.: '*Kto Bog veliy?*' (Who is the great God?) and '*Noch, kogda otnovogodivshemu miru ni do chego. Udary yego chasov okazalis' pshikom*' (Night, when the world that celebrated the New Year cared for nothing. The clock strikes turned out to be zilch). '*Prosto maskarad, v kotorom ochen' neredko za samoy-razsamoy maskoy taitiya pustota*' (Just a masquerade, in which very often the very-very mask conceals the emptiness). Cf.:

велии – great, obsolete. Related to *великий* (Etymological dictionary of the Russian language by Max Vassmer, n.d).

ПШИК – пшик, пшика, masc. (coll. fam.). Nothing, emptiness (Academic.ru, n.d.)

Yet another distinguishing feature of the Orthodox religious discourse is the use of vocabulary coming under the semantic field of Christianity. According to Bobryova (2013), "no other type of discourse contains as many specific lexical units and expressions as the religious discourse" (p. 298). In our opinion, this choice serves to emphasise misticality of Christianity, as well as the idea of sanctity of religion and faith. In the article under analysis, the author uses the lexemes *batyushka* (priest), *khristiane* (Christians), *post* (fast), *grekh* (sin), periphrastic combinations *skorbnyy put'* (mournful way), *prisoyedinit'sya k pastukham i volkhvam* (join the shepherds and the Magi), and *otrezok mezhdurazhdeniyem i smert'yu* (the interval between birth and death).

The phraseological component of the publication is reflected in the use of the following phraseological units: *otkroyet miru ob'yatiya* (open arms to the world), *tochka nevozvrata* (point of no return), incl. fixed biblical expressions *gifts of the Magi, Blagaya vest'* (Good News) which is thematically driven.

Another media text feature is intertextuality that is realised in the material under consideration by an allusion to the lines of Mikhail Lermontov's poem 'Quiet night. All harkens to the Maker, And two stars begin a dialogue', and that appears directly in the context '*Tikha i prekrasna eta noch*' (Quiet and beautiful this night is) '<...> *daleko v nebe svetit Zvezda, kotoraya ch'yey-to lichnoy pustyne pomogla obresti smysl*' (far away in the sky the star shines, which has helped somebody to gain sense), and in the Bible citations '*keeping watch over their flocks at night*' (Gospel of Luke, 2017, 2:8, p. 128), '*Adam, where are you?*' (Genesis, n.d., 3:1-24, para. 6).

5. Research Methods

When working with the selection of the Orthodoxy and the World portal media texts there were used integrated approach methods based on a wide range of cognate discipline methods. When doing research we were guided by the following methods: 1) content analysis; 2) discursive analysis; 3) linguoculturological analysis; 4) the analytical method. Thus, work methodology for the media texts featured on the portal under analysis is of interdisciplinary nature.

6. Findings

Summing up our brief analysis, let us emphasise that the media text size is not large; however, the author has not only managed to convey the message of the publication, but also relate the earthly life of Christ from birth to death on the cross. The text is structured in a logical way, is not overloaded with historic details, contains explanations that the present-day network user needs, brings hope to those who aspire to learn the Truth, warns those who are from year to year waiting for change, but ‘the year has begun but nothing has happened’. It is in the narrative simplicity that pragmalinguistics, not alien to the Orthodox media discourse and allowing the author to broaden his readership, manifests itself.

7. Conclusion

As our brief analysis shows, columns and consequently publications are wide-ranging and delve into many pressing issues. However, being part of the religious discourse, the portal texts are distinguished by their evaluativity oriented towards the religious moral values dating back to the Old Testament commandments and Jesus Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, whereas religious vocabulary, biblical expressions, citations from the Gospels and the Bible are often used in the portal materials. This phenomenon can be accounted for by the sublime tonality of the religious discourse in general and its contemporary media form in particular. Thus, it seems fair to say that the Orthodox publicistic media discourse revives lofty style traditions and high-level speech culture traditions in modernised Russia. Religious internet communication is characterised by the communication task diversity, mass character, which does not rule out certain elitism of the audience, expressiveness of the lexico-phraseological linguistic means, intertextuality, primarily based on Holy Writ texts. Any kind of communication in the religious sphere is genetically derived from the prototype of Holy Scripture and Sacred Tradition and relies on them (Itskovich, 2018, p. 6).

Religious communication, being a historically formed discourse has specific rhetoric. Since religious values permeate all areas of human activity – from fundamental science, art, practical medicine, and pedagogy to everyday social life it is important to study the material development pragmatic component and text-forming factors. The communicative task of the Orthodox publicistic media texts featuring on the Orthodoxy and the World website is defined by the missionary function specific to the religious discourse in particular, since the linguistic persona does not only need self-expression and communication but also self-perception as a member of a certain sector of society, in this instance the Orthodox community.

The analysis of the Orthodoxy and the World website media content has proved the statement that religious discourse holds its legitimate place in modern linguistics, which is acknowledged by linguists.

Acknowledgments

The publication was prepared with the support of the RUDN Program “5-100”.

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