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**"FEEL AT HOME": DISCOURSE PRACTICES IN HOTEL  
BUSINESS**

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*Abstract*

The article examines elements of new discourse practices of the Russian hospitality industry. The research is focused on written texts addressed to the client (guest) of the hotel and placed in the area of his or her residence (hotel rooms, apartments) in booklets, instructions, wall signs, etc. Their main genre-forming characteristics and communicative-pragmatic specificity are revealed. Discourse that are specific for hotel industry are described such as hotel guides, ecological texts and "genres of care". In particular, the hotel guide offers a cognitive scenario of the visitor's stay, modeling his or her needs and desires, and emotional state. It is this scenario of positive hotel experience that forms the genre of guidebooks and booklets addressed to the guest.

The texts that are analyzed in the article show that specific services in the sphere of hospitality determine special ways of communication with clients and form the discourse that is typical for hotel business. The goal to create the conditions "like at home" for the guest determines the interaction of institutional and interpersonal varieties of discourses. This is exactly what defines the communicative-pragmatic discourse of booklets and other information materials placed in the hotel room.

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**Keywords:** Discourse, discourse practices, hotel business, hospitality language, genre, hotel guide.



## 1. Introduction

In the course of the last two decades, linguistic studies saw the formation of the tradition of discourse classification, based on the predominant “service” of specific social spheres and institutions. V.I. Karasik states in his detailed overview of Russian discourse studies, that the division of discourse into specific types can be narrowed down to three approaches: sociolinguistic (who speaks), pragmalinguistic (how they speak), thematic (what is spoken about) (Karasik, 2014). As a rule, an analysis is carried out using “prototypical examples”, which carry no ambiguity in their identification with a particular social sphere. And the goal of such studies is cataloguing of discourses and genres representing them, that function in a certain society at a particular time. As a rule, the description is built on an a priori accepted premise that given speech material contains features of a specific type of discourse. However, when striving to subdivide the whole discourse continuum on types and subtypes, a researcher can come across such culture-bound items that can hardly fall into even the most thought out and detailed classification. For example, many of those who spent time in hotels saw a tablet that a guest can put on their door asking “do not disturb” or to clean the room. There are many ways to put this intention into words. Two of the simpler ideas vary from categorical imperative “Do not disturb” to the exhortative “Please do not disturb” (Grand Yazici, Turkey), informal “Went for a breath of fresh air. You can clean the room” and intimate phonetic symbolism that imitates deep sleep – “Tsss” (MariottTverskaya, Moscow), “...Zzz” (Nevsky Hotels Group, Saint Petersburg). Ways of asking to clean the room are also various: from traditional expressions, such as “Please clean the room” to non-verbal symbols. The whole collection of written texts that handle non-personal communications between a guest (client) and the hotel staff (hoteliers) is not likely to be named “hotel (specific) discourse”. Nevertheless, it can be named a discourse practice of hospitality industry.

We shall notice, that standardization of texts belonging to this sphere is hugely exaggerated. In the context of competition for customers, traditional messages gain previously unknown expression and persuasiveness. For instance, literary hotel Arina R (Pushkinskiye Gory, Pskov region) in their brochure inform arriving clients about the emotional state they will be in while staying there, apart from the room’s equipment.

*The main building of Arina R hotel contains 26 twin rooms, also 14 attic rooms. Brightly lit and spacious rooms on the first floor with small separate wooden balconies will do great even for a small family. Attic rooms with windows located right beneath the roof create a unique romantic atmosphere – at night the ceiling turns into a starry sky, and in the morning tender rays of sunshine will give you unforgettable moments of enjoyment of living. <...>Each room’s decor will not leave connoisseurs of comfort indifferent: the clearest air of Pushkinogorye along with the softness of beds and pillows and the whiteness of bed linen – everything here is made to insure the perfect relaxation to body and soul. Each room is also equipped with a mini-fridge, a Wi-Fi access, a TV, a phone, a hairdryer, and a set of soft terry towels.*

## 2. Problem Statement

The examples above show that rapidly developing hospitality industry (as it is known in the tourism business) forms special ways of communicating with clients (Fuster-Marquez, 2017, Ikayeva, 2014,

Prigarina, 2015). These examples represent only part of written texts, but forms of oral communication are also of huge interest. These are such forms as speaking between staff and clients, booking a hotel room via a phone call etc.

### **3. Research Questions**

But can we decide on the type of discourse they represent? Is it a “hotel discourse”? A service industry discourse? A “commercial hospitality” discourse? We have to agree with the notion that interpretation of the discourse margins as an analytical task implies that discourse is more of a product of the researcher’s work, than an object without margins, existing in reality, “ready” to be identified and mapped out (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2008).

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

That is why new discourse practices that form in ever-changing social reality are of undeniable interest. Our task is to find the best “observation angle” and try to establish phenomena of the language use with maximum precision, which as of yet cannot be classified under discourse theory and the theory of speech genres.

We use the notion of the order of discourse, introduced by N. Fairclough, for the purposes of our analysis. The order of discourse is a configuration of all types of discourses and genres in one social sphere or institution. The order of discourse is built on discourse practices by means of which “texts and speeches are produced, consumed and interpreted” (cited by (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2008). When analyzing discourse practices it is important to keep in mind that different discourses partially cover same social sphere. What is more, each of such discourses competes for filling the sphere with its own meaning.

From this standpoint we shall consider the order of discourse of the hospitality industry developing in Russian language.

Institutional sphere of hospitality is a part of the tourism industry (Pokhomchikova, 2014). The attention to this sphere is conditioned by its importance for the development of national economy. In the last 15 years, tourism discourse became the focal point of the researchers’ attention. Many linguistic and interdisciplinary works deal with discourse practices of tourism business, including their comparative aspect, ways of argumentation, communicative situations, naming, etc. (Filatova, 2012, Heller, Pujolar, & Duchêne, 2014, Moi, 2008, Sakaeva & Bazarova, 2014). However, hotel business sphere is less detailed in the context of discourse (Bluea & Harun, 2003, Frantasova, 2015, Fuster-Marquez, 2017, Ikayeva, 2014, Prigarina, 2015, Zaytseva & Kositskaya, 2017) and need a conduction of more thorough researches, including those based on Russian material.

### **5. Research Methods**

Our research focuses on written texts addressed to the hotel’s client (guest) and placed in the area of their accommodation (in rooms and apartments) in the forms of booklets, tablets, etc. (a total of 140 various texts). Texts in question are generally polymodal, i.e. they include both textual and visual parts.

The majority of information is given in both Russian and English languages (if the hotel is a part of an international hotel chain, Russian texts are the results of translation of English texts). This can be explained not just by multinationalism of prospective clients, but also by the fact that international hotel chains (such as IBIS, Novotel, etc.), which have unified standards of brand communication, are becoming more and more prominent in Russia.

To define genre specific elements of given texts we shall consider their discourse parameters (communicative goal, type of message sender and message recipient, text structure) and the specifics of the language.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Communication in the sphere of hospitality industry: from standard to uniqueness.

Communicative interactions between the hotel representatives and the client (guest) are part of the service industry, ruled by marketing communication laws and technologies, as in sales.

In positioning theory marketing is defined as a cognitive operation, i.e. it is “not a battle of products, it is a battle of perceptions”. In the world of marketing everything is a client’s or potential customer’s perception. The perception is real, while everything else is an illusion (Ries & Trout, 2007). Furthermore cognitive operations include the key notion of the positioning theory – brand. Brand must form a specific niche in the recipient’s mind. “Positioning is how you differentiate your product in the mind of your customer” (Trout & Rivkin, 2010). Therefore building in the recipient’s mind a model of a necessary product (service), that differ from other examples of the category, must favor its differentiation in the mind of the customer.

This implies the task of separating from rivals. In its core, this task is a cognitive operation aimed at creation of a niche in the minds of customers. Inside this niche, a model of a product or a service is formed with characteristics relevant for its target audience. For hospitality sphere, these characteristics are defined by category features of the hotel as an object of service, as well as by the requirements the hotel aims to satisfy.

Perceptions of a hotel and its services are based on a lexical meaning of the word (*hotel* – “a house for temporary accommodation of arriving guests with rooms for one or more persons and catering”), as well as on background knowledge about this object, formed by personal experience and acquaintance with social and discourse practices.

Requirements relevant for the client are presented in the hotel’s guest reviews – e.g. at special websites, such as [www.booking.com](http://www.booking.com). Guest reviews can help reconstruct client’s usual requirements. For instance, “comfortable for temporary accommodation”; “cozy, comfortable”, “felt at home”, “homey”; “polite staff”, “quiet, silent”, etc.

Such characteristics factor into hotel’s positioning strategy and become actual in discourse practices of the hotel business, building a positive image of an object in the mind of the customer.

Verbal interactions in hotel industry are generally realized under discourse practices typical for institutional (status oriented) discourses, where representatives of social groups or institutions engage in communication process by realizing their status-role positions under accepted social institutions.

Communication in institutional discourse is rather masked, which separates it from personal discourse. Institutional discourse has a specific pattern and its participants usually have a clear picture of the specifics of genre organization of information and mechanisms of its sharing (Swales, 1990, Zaytseva, & Kositskaya, 2017). However, the degree of conventionality of various types and genres of this discourse differs. There are soft and hard varieties of institutional discourse. Hotel discourse is a part of the soft variety of institutional discourse, as some of its verbiage can vary. Variants that separate one hotel from the others appear against a backdrop of standard communicative practices. Next we shall consider some of the original texts that are functioning in hotel industry, from the points of their discourse specifics and genre identification.

## 6.2. Hotel guide: IBIS is thinking about you...

Interaction of the basic pair of participants of communication is the core of institutional discourse. In the framework of hospitality sphere, we speak of a client (guest) and of a purveyor of services (a member of hotel's staff or a hotelier<sup>1</sup>). Given that their contacts confined to several typical situations (registration, guest's check in and out, room cleaning), booklet (guest book) is traditionally used to satisfy client's requirements. Booklet consists of standard information blocks: phone list, the rules of conduct (usually written as a legal document – “the guest/resident has a right”, “the guest/resident must”), the room's equipment, fire safety regulations, etc.

The IBIS hotel offers their guests a structured “Hotel Guide”, as opposed to the usual impersonal guidelines. Their guide includes the following blocks: “Your sleep is our priority”<sup>2</sup>, “We will take good care of you”, “Stay connected”, “Trust your taste”. Each of these blocks builds an image of a caring host, with two out of four blocks justly show verbalization of the concept of “care”. The same intention of all-around care that forms positive hoteliers' image is explicated in typical for this genre promising speech acts – commissives: *we are thinking about you, we promise you an unimpeded vacation, we will take care of the rest, etc.*

(1) *Everything is provided for: a modern design, technical equipment, soundproofing... Here, in IBIS, we're dedicated to your comfort. Our black-out curtains will not allow morning sun to disturb you. We offer big fluffy pillows and super-soft duvets. The only difficulty will be getting out of bed!*

(2) *We are going above and beyond to guarantee you the perfect stay. If something goes wrong we encourage you to come to us – we will take care of the rest. If we can't resolve an issue in 15 minutes, the serviced concerned will be free, guaranteed<sup>3</sup>.*

Information on dining in the hotel shows the orientation to the client's requirements, which is reflected in constructions with the semantics of alternative (choice):

(3) *Eat as and when you like in the ibis kitchen. 24 hours a day. 7 days a week. Hot dishes and cold drinks. Order them in the bar or at the reception desk and bring them to your room if you feel like*

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<sup>1</sup>Hotelier – an owner or a manager of a hotel. This word is fixed in Russian National Corpus and in the Orthographic academic resource AKADEMOS web-portal of The V.V. Vinogradov Russian Language Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. <http://orfo.ruslang.ru/>

<sup>2</sup>The IBIS hotel's slogan: Attractive dreams for sweet prices.

<sup>3</sup>Serious tone of service responsibilities is contrasted with informal ironic side notes: *The 15 minute guarantee applies to breakfast, room's condition, snacks and drinks in the bar. BUT the weather is out of the realm of our possibilities...*

it. <...>Come enjoy our creative, colourful cuisine. We also have some balanced meals for those, who pay attention to a healthy diet.

“The best is in Novotel” booklet pursues a similar communicative goal of hotel navigation. Novotel’s marketing strategy is built on “attention to details”, which is stated on the first page of their guide:

(4) *Why the whole world knows and loves Novotel? The answer is quite simple. In our hotel each guest will find a service that suits them best: from conference-hall to children’s area, from fitness centre to hamam. We know the value of attention to details. Novotel’s team of professionals is always ready to aid you.*

The texts of Novotel’s guide lack the sense of humor that is present in the IBIS’s texts. At the same time, as well as in IBIS, they are united by the intention to cover every possible requirement of their clients:

(5) *You will have an around-the-clock access to Macintosh computers and free internet on the first floor lobby. There you will also find a special play area for children aged 3-8.*

(6) *Breakfast for your own taste. Choose anything you like. Our “early bird” menu is made for those who get up early.*

The guide’s purpose extends beyond the information on existing options. It also contains recommendations and advices, colored with empathy towards the guests’ strenuous daily schedules:

(7) *Relax in our hamam or visit the massage room after a long day of sight-seeing or meetings.*

(8) *Recharge your energy in our fitness centre In Balance by Novotel using our free training equipment.*

When comparing texts above to traditional tourist guides, we can see substantial differences. The only thing that links them is the referential information function (ref., e.g., (Pokhomchikova, 2014). Nevertheless, hotel guide deals with a number of marketing tasks: formation of the positive image of a hotel as a subject of hotel service; establishment of informal contact with a client; formation of demand on additional services; regulation of the guest’s conduct under corporate requirements. Essentially, hotel guide provides a certain cognitive scenario of a guest’s stay, modelling their wishes and requirements, as well as their emotional state. It is this scenario of positive hotel experience that forms the genre of guidebooks and booklets addressed to the guest.

### **6.3. Ecological discourse in the hotel interior: “Park Inn by Radisson hotels love our planet”**

Western consumers became accustomed to the topic of environmentalism, energy conservation and clear water. This is reflected in messages to clients of western hotels and international hotel chains. Russian hotel industry facilities picked up on this practice and started copying it with various degrees of persuasiveness.

Education and admonition are the main communicative intention of ecological texts. These tasks are solved by clarification of some of non-verbal actions’ meanings to the guest:

(1) *Dear Guests!*

*A towel left on the side of the bathtub or on the floor means: "Please change the towel". A towel left on the rack means: "I am still using it". Irrational washing pollutes the water. Let us help the nature!* (Forum hotel, Minsk)

Goals of ecological education, based on emotional and rational argumentation, are realized by means of extended metaphor.

(2) *Here your towels grow trees!*

*Acting under the program of Positive Hospitality, our hotel suggests you use towels more than once.*

*How many trees will you plant today? Leave towels on towel holder if you want to use them again. Resources saved on the reduction of water and energy consumption will help financing forest recreation projects. By participating in Plant for the Planet program our hotel transfers funds for tree planting: 1 seedling a minute around the world. (Novotel).*

Appeals to reason are the basis of persuading argumentation in the message to the Park Inn hotel's guests. It is presented on a separate card and its title reads: "Every drop matters".

(3) *Park Inn by Radisson hotels love our planet. Will you stand with us?*

*Each day millions of pieces of bed linen are being washed for hotel rooms with intensive use of water and laundry detergent. We and our guests are trying to reduce the amount of consumed water. Usually we change bed linen every three days or after the check out, depending on what happens first. In one day, this helps us conserve up to 15 liters of water per bed, as well as use less laundry detergent.*

*If you still would like your bed linen to be changed today, leave this card on the pillow. (Park Inn by Radisson)*

Ecological social advertising can be mentioned as a genre prototype of such texts. However considered hotel messages are distinguished by persuasive and consecutive self-presentation uncharacteristic to social advertising. Each text has an explication of its own social responsibility: *Park Inn by Radisson hotels love our planet; our hotel transfers funds for tree planting; 1 seedling a minute around the world*. This is a genre-forming feature for such texts that separates them from ecological education genres in other social spheres (articles, social advertising, textbooks, etc.).

#### **6.4. "Genres of care": Welcome, would you like some water?**

The demand for staff members capable of effective communication with guests in hotel industry is rising all over the globe. A chain of communications that happen during the guest's stay in the hotel is known as "hospitality language"<sup>4</sup>. This implies that "hospitality language" exists in both oral and written forms. In the last case, we can see different messages meant to make closer contact, even if it is non-personal.

There are certain "unidentified genre objects" functioning in hospitality industry. These are various tablets meant to make a closer, more informal contact with the guest. A hotel service standard is a presence of the tablet for a chambermaid that informs her when she can clean the room without disturbing the guest (see above). Discourse practices of international hotel chains with branches in Russia show a tendency for

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<sup>4</sup>Hospitality language could be attributed to the terms of hotel industry [1].

non-standard composition of such information by including personal intonations (these are marked by the 1<sup>st</sup> person verb forms and the pronoun I):

- (4) *Blissfully sleeping. Please do not disturb; on the back side: I have already woke up and went out. Please come in (IBIS).*
- (5) *I am resting for the moment. Please come later; on the back side: Please clean the room (Holiday Inn).*
- (6) *I would like to be by myself. Please do not disturb; on the back side: Went for a breath of fresh air. You can clean the room (Novotel).*

Apart from the door tablets, hotel rooms have other types of messages representing care. E.g. breakfast information is written on a separate tablet “*A cozy breakfast in Novotel*”. On the table a guest will see another tablet with a message of care and friendship: “*Welcome, would you like some water? Make yourself comfortable (IBIS).*”

In the Park Inn by Radisson hotel after cleaning the room chambermaid leaves a tablet similar to a calling card:

*We have taken great pride in preparring this room to make you feel at home. Thank you and have a most enjoyable stay! Nadezhda, your chambermaid (Park Inn by Radisson).*

At the same time “hospitality language” shows traces of other discourses, common to Russian discourse practices in institutional spheres: order, request-prohibition.

*We urge you to follow the hotel’s rules and not to bring seafood to the rooms (Hyundai Hotel, Vladivostok).*

## 7. Conclusion

The study of new discourse practices in hotel industry can be perceived as a visualization of a well-known in social constructionism statement. According to this statement discourse practices always function in dialectical cooperation with other social practices. The specifics of services in hospitality sphere determine the order of discourse appropriate for this sphere. The task of creating such living conditions that would make a guest feel “at home” conditions the interrelation of institutional and personal discourses. It can be seen in booklet texts, texts of informational materials placed in hotel rooms, and realized through specific “genres of care” that distinguish modern hotel hospitality communication.

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