



**Veracity as basic
category of journalistic
discourse: methodology
of interpretation.**

VERACITY AS BASIC CATEGORY OF JOURNALISTIC DISCOURSE: METHODOLOGY OF INTERPRETATION

LA VERACIDAD COMO CATEGORÍA BÁSICA DEL DISCURSO PERIODÍSTICO: METODOLOGÍA DE LA INTERPRETACIÓN

ABSTRACT

The category of veracity, as well as objectivity, is declared to be the main principle in the theory and practice of journalism. The journalistic descriptions of categories have their own specificity as compared to philosophical considerations. The veracity of journalistic texts including the closely related categories of objectivity and accuracy are of great importance in contemporary research discourses. The object of the research is scientific concepts of veracity, objectivity, accuracy, facts, knowledge; we focus on their peculiarities and purpose in journalistic discourse. The article deals with approaches and ways of veracity interpretation in mass media. The specific features and purposes of veracity are analyzed. Attention is drawn to multi-dimensionality of the category which is revealed in journalistic texts in connection with informativity, accuracy, objectivity; indicators and criteria of veracity and accuracy in contemporary media texts. Researching of objectivity through sub-categories of informative value, accuracy and objectivity leads to the conclusion that it is more appropriate to take into consideration the interference between objectivity and subjectivity, accuracy and approximation, various types of information required for veracity evaluation..

KEYWORDS: veracity, objectivity, accuracy and completeness of information, social fact, social cognition.

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RESUMEN

La categoría de veracidad, así como la objetividad, se declara como el requisito principal en la teoría y la práctica del periodismo. Las descripciones periodísticas de las categorías tienen su propia especificidad en comparación con las consideraciones filosóficas. La veracidad de los textos periodísticos, incluidas las categorías estrechamente relacionadas de objetividad y precisión, son de gran importancia en los discursos de investigación contemporáneos. El objeto de la investigación son los conceptos científicos de veracidad, objetividad, precisión, hechos, conocimiento; nos enfocamos en sus peculiaridades y propósito en el discurso periodístico. El artículo trata sobre enfoques y formas de interpretación de la veracidad en los medios de comunicación. Se analizan las características y propósitos específicos de la veracidad. Se llama la atención sobre la multidimensionalidad de la categoría que se revela en los textos periodísticos en relación con la informatividad, la precisión, la objetividad; indicadores y criterios de veracidad y precisión en textos de medios contemporáneos. Investigar la objetividad a través de subcategorías de valor informativo, precisión y objetividad lleva a la conclusión de que es más apropiado tomar en consideración la interferencia entre objetividad y subjetividad, precisión y aproximación, varios tipos de información requeridos para la evaluación de la veracidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: veracidad, objetividad, exactitud e integridad de la información, hecho social, cognición social.

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ARTÍCULO RECIBIDO: 3 DE JUNIO DE 2018

ARTÍCULO ACEPTADO PARA PUBLICACIÓN: 25 DE JULIO DE 2018

ARTÍCULO PUBLICADO: 31 DE AGOSTO DE 2018

1. INTRODUCTION

The category of veracity as well as closely related problems of media reality reflection and social construction is of great importance in contemporary research discourses. The range of approaches to the possibilities of adequate reality reflection in journalistic texts is extremely diverse. They are sometimes diametrically opposed from the proclamation of the complete “loss of meaning” in media discourse to the journalism’s ability of society consolidation and full and complex life portrayal [Lektorskij 2009; Bloor 1991; Couldry, Hepp 2016; Goldman 2008]. These views reproduce the philosophical doctrines which can be grouped into two approaches; the realists admit the cognition of the real world and the constructivists consider the image of the world to be the human consciousness construct. We follow the approach of V.A. Lektorskij who offered his own variant of constructive realism claiming that the subject in his cognition deals with the world he is constructing himself. Herewith, the constructed world itself is not fantastic, it is the real world projection.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS.

The object of the research is scientific concepts of veracity, objectivity, accuracy, facts, knowledge; we focus on their peculiarities and purpose in journalistic discourse. The issues of truth and veracity are considered to be interdisciplinary. Thus, the research is based on philosophical, epistemological, linguistic, approaches; it relies on journalism, media law, professional ethics.

The research methodology is based upon interdisciplinary approach. Descriptive research method, built on the information gathering techniques, observation, generalization, comparison and classification of theoretical material is used. Methods of

analytical summarization and theoretical reconstruction of theoretical representations of journalistic discourse represented in the scientific literature are applied. The research material for the study is taken from scientific papers representing theoretical reflection of category-based journalism and media theory.

Results and Discussion. The category of veracity refers to the most important principles and postulates in the theory and practice of journalism. The requirement for information veracity corresponds to the essence of journalism as a type of social activity aimed at creating adequate picture of the world, overview of ongoing events and modern life. The researchers reveal information veracity through the categories of «accuracy (the degree of relevance to the real prototype of the message) and completeness (decoding of meaning and significance of ongoing events) [Korkonsenko 2004: 69]; «authenticity of the message is confirmed by comments, references to authoritative sources of information» [Melnikova 2014: 95]. B. Lozovsky indicates three meanings of «information veracity»: «1. Undoubt, authentic, real information; 2. Article 57 of Federal Law of Russian Federation “On Law” stipulates credible and reliable information i.e. facts which can be proved by legally correct procedures (using documents, witnesses, expert judgments etc.). 3. In the practice of journalism veracity refers to information published with obligatory reference to the source [Lozovskij 2004]. The interpretation of veracity is synonymous with “truthfulness” which is the leading principle of journalistic activities.

Veracity is the central meaning-making category in media law and Ethics Codes, which regulate professional norms in mass media. The main source of law in media sphere is Federal Law of Russian Federation “On Law”. The category «veracity» appears in articles 47 (journalists’ rights) and 49 (journalists’ responsibilities) as a claim «to check the accuracy of reported information» [FZ “O SMI”]. Thus checking the accuracy of reported information to real facts is both the right and the responsibility of a journalist. The appeal to the veracity and the requirement to verify the information are directly or indirectly revealed in many articles of Ethics Codes.

Journalists reveal social facts which can be «found in stable phenomena with statistical nature». Social fact «is turning into sociologi-

cal fact». Social fact in journalism is turning into journalistic fact [Sotsiologija zhurnalistsiki 2014: 94]. Facts are ranged in journalistic media texts in accordance with their veracity, accuracy, completeness, scale, significance. E. Prokhorov distinguishes «facts» (objective significant data), «factics» (real insignificant facts) and «factoids» («tertiary facts», assumption of the facts existence). Facts mainly refer to significant, meaningful events, statements and acts. «Factics» appear in insignificant facts to be mentioned incidentally. Researchers assume that real life facts which can be proved (written forms, foto-, fono-, video records with «evidences of authenticity») are of paramount importance. The information for the audience should be strengthened by references to the source of information, approvals of the interview, copies of the documents, exact references to the book or article, etc. If the information cannot be supported with documents, it “should be used with caution”. This information may be exaggerated, accidental, insignificant. [Prokhorov 2012: 117-118; 296].

The category of veracity is admitted to be complex and multidimensional. It is revealed through complementary categories of accuracy, informativity, objectivity [Panchenko 2010: 25]. Following the logic we are considering the category of veracity in media discourse through categories of informativity, accuracy, objectivity.

I. Informativity. The primary function of the information in public sphere is to provide the audience with relevant and accurate data in a wide range of human activities (politics, economics, science, ideology, religion, art, moral values, etc.). The basic category for the theory of journalism is considered to be social information alongside with its types mass and journalistic information. Journalists mainly deal with social information which «is produced in the process of human activities, reflects the social significance of the facts, aimed at communication and goal achievements depending on their social status» [Lektorskiy 2012: 75].

Mass information is aimed at all social groups (quantitative parameter) and therefore it is generally relevant and accessible (qualitative parameter) [Lazutina 2004: 29].

S. Korkonsenko regards journalistic information as «the most social» in its significance and prevalence. The researcher claims that journalistic information «combines data proved by documents, their interpretation from the position of social interests and personal evidence of the events». As many researchers claim, the core characteristics of journalistic information are documentalism in reality reflection, relevance of media content, idea richness, analytical approach, popularity of complex issues description, regularity of information, collectivity of labour [Korkonsenko 2004: 81-85]. These characteristics are considered in conjunction with information selection criteria (newness, veracity, timeliness, relevance, etc.).

The researchers distinguish potential information (until it contacts with the audience), accepted (perceived by the audience), real (used by the audience) [Prokhorov 2012: 45]. This classification mainly reflects information process and journalists' cognition stages. The stages are related to reality reflection, text creation and audience perception.

E.S. Jakovleva states that the quality of information (completeness/ incompleteness) and the quantity of information (sufficiency/ insufficiency) correspond to the veracity degrees. Objective completeness refers to information from person's own perception («one saw it», «one heard it») or «on the basis of absolute truth of logical prerequisites and strictness of logical conclusion» (the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides) [Jakovleva 1994: 213]. Incomplete or insufficient information is marked by special language indicators of veracity such as it seems, as if, maybe, who knows, perhaps.

Information gathering corresponds to its sources: direct (I see/hear), indirect knowledge-based (I think/consider), «second hand» (according to, the mayor said that, opposition media consider that, according to preliminary information, anonymous sources say that, allegedly, in my opinion).

Mechanisms of reality reflection and their verbal embodiment in journalistic texts correspond to various information types. Thus, A.A. Tertychnyj distinguishes six information types. Their combination helps to cover a wide range of real-life events: 1) fact-based

information (veracious information justifying the authenticity of any phenomena in the present or the past); 2) probable information (assumptions, predictions, hypotheses, versions. This type of information may be fact based but not necessarily.); 3) preventive information (reports about planned events that must take place in the nearest future); 4) evaluative information (actor's attitude to evaluated subject); 5) regulatory information (requirements addressed by society to social groups and individuals; laws, regulations, laws of the authorities, etc.); 6) program information (measures leading to the desired result formulated by a journalist; tips, recommendations) [Tertychnyj 2011: 53-58].

E.P. Prokhorov analyzes journalistic texts as the unity of four information types: descriptive, prescriptive, evaluative, and normative (d, p, v, n). Descriptive information is based on facts, knowledge of «as it is», giving the audience «richness of the surrounding world - events, phenomena, laws, processes and human relations, characters, fates». Prescriptive information (perception of «desirable future») reflects facts comprehension through the journalist's social ideal. Evaluative information is the result of data comparison with social ideal. It helps to evaluate current events, tendencies, regularities. Journalist can express his own viewpoint or «give» the fact impartially. However, in both cases value-based approach is inevitable. Normative information answers to the question «what to do» [Prokhorov 2012: 49-51].

The theory of «elementary expressive means of journalism» by E.I. Pronin is based on three information types: fact-based (to cover subject matter), character-based (to express main idea) and norm-based (to give draft idea) [Pronin 1980: 82; 13].

Literature review leads to the conclusion that various types of information (facts, evaluations, opinions, hypotheses, forecasts, versions, direct and indirect information, «second / third-hand information», facts and factoids) are used in journalistic texts. These types take different positions on veracity scale and reflect specific nature of journalists' creativity aimed at informing and influencing. Text narration results in complex plexus of objective and subjective principles, facts, their interpretation and evaluation. However the core function of journalistic information

is target audience provision with timely, most recent, veracious knowledge which satisfies consumers' information needs.

II. Accuracy. Accuracy as the notion of logic and gnoseology indicates the grade (or the measure) of relevance of the scientific knowledge to the reality. The contemporary philosophical approaches assume that «the accuracy of knowledge cannot be absolute, it is historically changeable and relevant»; moreover, even in formalized theories the methods of knowledge identification reveal their epistemic limitation [Kuraev 2009]. The definition of accuracy in journalism draws on the philosophical reflection of this category. Accuracy is «the degree of relevance to the real prototype of a message» [Korkonosenko 2004: 69]; «relevance of the content of the news event to reality» [Ilyinova 2012]; «the high degree of relevance of event reflection on the lexical-meaning level of a text» [Melnikova 2014: 95]. The researchers mark out various factors of objective limitation of accuracy representation in journalistic media texts:

- the real world itself is complex, it is highly imprecise, vague, approximate rather than absolutely precise and accurate;
- in most cases it is sufficient for communicational needs to represent real situations approximately or roughly: «one can simply schedule a certain development of situation to make an addressee be able to think up the details and additional descriptions of a situation» [Olyanich 2007: 127];
- the absolute precision is excluded at the linguistic level since the natural language is based on vague, imprecise notions and it has a valuable quantity of inaccurate signs and nominations at all levels, e.g., whitish, someone, anybody, scarcely, hardly, almost, a kind of, about, likely, neither ... nor, whether .. or.

Overall, the researchers distinguish the objective and subjective factors for the usage of language items of accuracy various degrees. The objective factor is the reality itself, knowable and perceptible to different extents, and hard to be precisely nominated. The subjective factors are accuracy or inaccuracy of personal knowledge; personal certainty or uncertainty in the information veracity; personal plans to hide the precise information or

to communicate the false information; lack of personal responsibility for the information; personal intentions to smooth the harsh nominations [Arutyunova 1005: 5; Olyanich 2007: 120; Panchenko 2010: 37-42]. What determines linguistic inaccuracy is the broad range of lexical items with vague and uncertain semantic components, with the tendency to rounding the non-integral numbers, with polysemy, synonymy, homonymy, generalization, reductions, euphemization, metaphoricization, expressivization.

The linguistic accuracy / inaccuracy depends on the communicational situation and communicants' pragmatic goals and interests. There may be no need for being accurate in the communication, since it is not practically necessary to precise sharply, for example, the quantity of people gathered for a meeting, or to indicate the wind speed with an accuracy of seconds. Alongside, "it is necessary to mind the factor of addresser's personality, their forgetfulness, careless verbalization, psychic and emotional conditions of the speech" [Panchenko 2010: 36, 40].

The accuracy of the represented event in the publicist style corresponds generally to news materials and informational function [Ilyinova 2012; Melnikova 2014]. It is evident especially in terms, special lexical items and proper nouns usage. However, it is clear that the demarcation between accuracy and approximations is exposed not so much by the genres opposition as by the communicational situation, pragmatic goals and interests, and the need for generalized or detailed representation of an event.

III. Objectivity. The category of objectivity is also imported to the journalistic discourse from philosophy. The philosophical interpretation of objectivity relies on ontological and epistemological approaches. From the ontological view, objectivity refers to the external world (external for the mind). In the epistemological meaning, objectivity refers to the representation of the cognitively independent material reality in the mind. Objectivity indicates a set of things, an object's being, processes themselves regardless the cognitive consciousness [Filosofia 2004; Ivin 1997].

Objectivity is one of the meaning-making categories in both theoretical and practical discourses of journalism. The imperative of

both objectivity and veracity of the information is the principle mostly proclaimed in textbooks, Ethics Codes and other normative documents in journalism: objectivity is the main demand for journalistic texts; objectivity and honesty are key principles of journalism, etc. The issue of objectivity in journalism refers mainly to factual data. The journalists start selecting the data when searching the information and end with integrating facts into texts. The objective data in journalistic perspective is the ones that base upon facts, not upon speculations, illusions, or fantasies; they embrace empirical evidences, logical groundings and not-biased assertions [Kozhemyakin 2011: 188]. The contortion of the reality for author's interests or according to author's fantasies "is completely at odds with the laws and ethics of journalism" [Korkonosenko 2004: 83].

The general approaches to objectivity in the theory and practice of journalism reproduce the philosophical interpretations of the category.

The first approach, factualist, admits the reality as it is beyond our mind. Factualists claim that the fact lays beyond the theory (an informational conception of media, editors' policy, genre or format, etc.), it is independent from it, and thus it is what makes us suppose it objective.

The second approach, theoretist, considers the fact to be a determined statement about the fragment of reality. The theory (world-view, ideology, culture, editors' policy, media format) determines the objective fact. The objectivity appears in such journalistic texts features as argumentativeness and logical coherence: "the issue of objectivity is (...) the question of argumentativeness and cogency of interpretations based on factual analysis, conclusions, suppositions and statements" [Prokhorov 2012: 118-120]. We are facing here not much the representation of objective facts in journalistic texts as the grounded subjectivity.

The third approach draws on the mixed interpretation of objectivity as the pluralism of opinions. Thus, in accordance with this approach, B.N. Lozovsky corresponds objectivity with the means of informational representation in texts: equity and emotional

neutrality in events representing [Lozovsky 2004].

As many researchers claim, it is more difficult to provide the objectivity in representing reality rather than to provide the veracity of represented facts. As E.P. Prokhorov writes, "... both in gnoseological (cognitive difficulties) and in social (impact of positions) perspectives the absolute realization of the principle [of objectivity] is impossible", though "there are general demands for making journalists closer to constructing the adequate worldview" [Prokhorov 2012: 117]. Journalists communicate with their audiences through objectively existing media texts. Different types of agents produce the latter: individual (or personal) ones, i.e. subjectively engaged authors of texts, and collective (or social) ones, i.e. editor board, media with its ideology and conception. The human messages cannot exist but with "traces" of social interactions. Alongside, the subjectivity of journalistic texts "should not be expressed through the rough biases, substituting facts for their subjective interpretation" [Korkonosenko 2004: 82]. The social fact emerges as a journalistic fact "only under reflection and organic implementation into the social experience of journalists" [Stilisticheskii ...2006: 97]. Therefore, the objective roots for journalistic media texts are possible only due to agents who can generate, perceive, understand and interpret ideas and meanings.

The journalistic discourse is preliminary based upon common sense, empirical experience, "generalized empirical means for cognition" [Svitich 2003] rather than upon formal logics principles. Journalism produces the knowledge that is "operative knowledge of reality in its explicit and implicit representations". This knowledge is not scientific in its nature, it "cannot tend for absolute truth, but it should be reliable enough to make people cope with the changeable reality" [Lazutina 2004: 43].

Category of objectivity is traditionally corresponds to expressively and emotionally neutral representations of events. These representations base on the stylistic neutrality, impersonality and equity. Such features are typical for informational messages representing (relatively) objective version of what goes on in the world [Melnikova 2014: 92; Ilyinova 2012; Sarafannikova 2006]. The rest of gen-

res are "seized in the cage" of subjectivity (e.g. commentaries) or "trespass the limits of unbiased representation" (analytical texts) [Olyanich 2007: 54, 64].

Thus, the objective nature of media texts appears through information based upon facts. The subjective nature is "unavoidable manifestation of authors' personalities that defines the manner of reflection on objective social issues" [Lavrenevskaya 1989; cit. on: Panchenko 2010: 52]. S.G. Korkonosenko states that the subjective features of journalistic texts do not necessarily unveil the rough biases or substitution of facts. We should take into account the "mixed" interpretation of objectivity by B.N. Lozovsky, which embraces both the completeness and precision of facts representation and the pluralism and equity of opinions [Lozovsky 2004].

Veracity is the key principle of journalism anchored in normative media documents and Ethics Codes. Veracity draws on relevant to reality data and checked facts. It refers to the true, precise and full information as well as to valuable informational sources, tools of data gathering, and means for factual representation in media texts. The peculiarities of journalism is that it does not exist beyond the media practice. This is why the theoretical descriptions of categories often rely on common sense, associative cognition and intuition methods.

Researching of objectivity through sub-categories of informative value, accuracy and objectivity leads to the conclusion that there are no absolute values in media discourse (neither absolute truth, nor absolute accuracy, nor absolute objectivity). It is rather more appropriate to mind the interference between objectivity and subjectivity, accuracy and approximation, various types of information required for veracity evaluation.

3. CONCLUSION

The criteria of veracity in journalistic texts are references to informational sources, quotations of communicants, evidences of agents, usage of documentarily approved data. Idealistically, journalists construct the objective-subjective worldview that is close to reality. They make "the panorama of actual social life" to help audience cope with the rea-

lity, socialize, and make adequate decisions. The criteria of accuracy are quantitative data, number nominations, statistics, terminology, special lexical items from various epistemic fields and professions, proper nouns usage (geographical and organizational names, abbreviations and word constructions). ■

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