

Role of Media Rumors in the Modern Society

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the using of media rumors as pragmatic influence mechanism in the modern communication. The printed and electronic messages with rumors make the material of research. The complex methods of analysis of the rumors role in the modern society are used. The inductive, descriptive and comparative, cognitive and discursive, semantic, definitional, functional and stylistic analysis is carried out. For the complex analysis of rumors in the modern media discourse, verbal means of rumors impact on the addressee in modern foreign-language and Russian mass media linguacultural, linguapragmatic, discursive approaches are applied. In the article, we realize the aim of the study. We identify the role of media rumors in the modern society. The ways of analysis are useful for development of rumorology, communication theory, linguapragmatics, sociolinguistics, cultural linguistics, media linguistics. In the article, we establish that mass media trying to realize the function of estimation and critics create and spread rumors themselves, use actively pseudo arguments and lie instead of exposure of various rumors, pseudo arguments, lies.

KEYWORDS

Rumors, rumorology, functions, information, influence, communicative strategies and tactics, verbal means, media discourse, mass media, culture, society

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Introduction

The problem of appearance and perception of rumors is of great interest of many psycholinguists, sociolinguists and researchers of other scientific fields who study different aspects of influence on (Dmitriyev, Latynov & Khlopyev 1997; Le Bon, 1998; Pendleton, 1998; Olshansky, 2001; Zheltukhina, 2003; Knapp, 2004; Miller, 2006; Slyshkin & Chizh, 2008; Zheltukhina & Omelchenko, 2008; 2011, etc.). The analysis of factual material (printed and electronic media

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messages) shows that the process of rumor spreading was brought to the level of state policy with generous funding of researches in that field at the beginning of the 21st century. The advocacy with rumors consists of systematic usage of rumors to influence human brain and feelings of particular group of people having definite goal with social significance (military, economic, political etc.), it is realized on the personal and collective level through mass media (press, radio, television, cinema, and internet).

The concept “rumor” is perceived as coming from one or more people information statement about some events than are not officially confirmed, it is conveyed orally from one person to another and orally or in written through communication media (Zheltukhina & Razmerova, 2010). Rumors deal with important for particular social group events, correspond its needs and interests. Perception and reproduction of heard information are caused by dissatisfaction of needs and their expectation for being satisfied. Spreading rumor is a result of collective creation, collective attempt to explain problematical and emotive situation. The concept “media rumors” are the information message proceeding from one or more persons about some not confirmed officially events arising spontaneously or created artificially distributed and duplicated by means of modern information and communication technologies broadcast orally or in written through mass media means and relayed further in much the changed look functioning from the moment of his generation until official confirmation or denial (Borodina & Zheltukhina, 2013; 2015a; 2015b).

Literature Review

The problem of mass communication in Russia, especially in sphere of mass information is traditionally studied in theory of speech, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, the theory of influence, stylistics. Beginning with middle 70s of the 20th century texts functioning in the sphere of mass communication are recognized as a matter of interdisciplinary research dealing with the problems of defining the status of language of mass media, ways of describing media-texts of different types, determination of the role of language, texts of mass media in the process of formation of language and speech culture of its native speakers (Zheltukhina, 2010; 2011; Slyshkin et al., 2014). The studying of media texts in cognitive-discursive paradigm and linguacultural aspect is related to new approaches. Today the most popular approaches are comprehensive approach, considering language of mass media as a matter of interdisciplinary research (Zasursky, 2008) and systems approach allowing us to see the matter of research in its specified integrity (Zheltukhina, 2010). Integral theoretical comprehension of media communication has become possible only nowadays. Multifold approach to the matter of interest allowing us to change extensive methods and describing techniques to intensive studying of media discourse and more systematic its conception was developed thanks to references to processes of language functioning under different conditions, language comprehension as anthropological phenomena. The change from monological communicative paradigm of totalitarian society (one person says, other listen to him and accomplish) to dialogical paradigm of pluralist society affected media discourse, caused journalists’ communicative freedom consisting of abundance of innovations, preference for unusual forms of thoughts` expression, widening of standard language limits and sometimes even deliberate violations of language standards. Such communicative freedom allowed printed mass media to present

a large amount of unchecked or distorted information and rumors using lexical, grammatical and stylistic means (Zheltukhina, 2011; Dobronichenko et al., 2012; Borodina & Zheltukhina, 2015a, 2015b, Zheltukhina et al., 2016b; Zheltukhina et al., 2016c). In this article, we will discover the main role of rumors in modern printed mass media.

Review of publications on the subject showed that works of domestic and foreign linguists in the field of comparative linguistics, socio-and psycholinguistics, pragmalinguistics, cognitive linguistics, cultural linguistics, stylistics, rhetoric, of the theory of journalism, and also the theory of discourse, the theory of influence, the theory of rumors have formed theoretical base of the research.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to identify the role of media rumors in the modern society.

Research questions

The overarching research question of this study was as follows:

How can we identify the role of media rumors in the modern society?

Methods

The aim of the research has defined the choice of methods of the analysis. In work, we apply the following methods: inductive, descriptive and comparative, cognitive and discursive, semantic, definitional, functional and stylistic analysis. A methodological basis of work is system approach. According to the principles of system approach, any phenomenon is considered as integrity in unity of all its communications and relations. For the complex analysis of rumors in a modern media discourse, verbal means of rumors impact on the addressee in modern foreign-language and Russian mass media linguacultural, linguapragmatic, discursive approaches are used.

Results and Discussion

The topic and contexts of rumors are always relevant because aspiration of recipient for getting information about issue concerning him is an important stimulus to spread and perceive a rumor. In other words, irrelevant rumor is not perceived and spread among massive recipient and quickly disappears. Very often massive recipient deals with something unintelligible but as he thinks very important, as a result the search of information becomes more intense to clear it up. That is why demand for press and informational websites and forums is increased. Top ratings of TV and radio programs are the evidences of great interest of recipient especially when national chief executive campaign or minister elections are held, different disasters, terrorist activities, military coups, exchange devaluation, flurries, mass strike or other events affecting a lot of people (Zheltukhina et al., 2016a). However, it happens that official mass media does not give explanations defusing tension of physical activity, so people try to clear the situation up themselves and do it using usual notions.

Authenticity of information spreading with rumors could be quite different: reliable and false with details that distort reliable information or add some features of plausibility to information that is false. Such variations are results



of the fact that plot of the rumor changes because of its adaptation for physiological needs of mass recipient in the process of rumor's circulation.

Prejudices existing in a society, simplicity and availability of emerging need to be satisfied thanks to information from reliable sources are main reasons for quickness of rumors spreading. Rumor is reproduced and it is trusted not because it seems to be truth but it satisfies physiological need of recipient and addresser that was not satisfied in another way.

Social nature of rumors is explained by social sphere of their creation and perception ("bush telegraph"). The fact that rumors affect personal opinion of recipient greatly, allows using them purposeful, for example, in political struggle, commercial activity to promote product or service and remove competitors.

According to the research two main characteristic features of rumors were developed:

1. Informational, defining objective degree of authenticity videlicet the attitude of statement that is a basis of rumor towards truth;
2. Expressive, recording general type of emotional reaction that is caused by rumor in a process of its perceiving by the audience – wish, fear or hostility.

The Popularity of rumors in society and mass media is an evidence of them accomplishing important social functions. Symbolically there are two levels of functional orientation of rumors: the level of a group, the level of an individual (Zheltukhina & Omelchenko, 2008, 2011; Zheltukhina, 2014a, 2014b, 2015).

The forming of identity is one of functions. Because of spreading of a rumor an individual or mass media enters the scope of persons who possess information and becomes identical to them, almost one of them.

The increasing of homogeneity of opinions (at the level of groups) is another function of rumors in mass media. Homogeneity of a group is increasing because intragroup rumors' discussion encourages crystallization of common point of view and decreasing of interindividual variability of opinions. In such way printed mass media can form particular attitude of their customers towards some events, encourage them to act. That is how deliberate agitation of recipient against authority works in Russian press uniting the group of voters,

e.g.,

We've all heard how social networks such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube help to spread democracy around the world by mobilizing the masses and making it easier to topple dictators. Now, we're now seeing a darker side to them. In some cases, they're being co-opted by governments as disinformation tools, used by authoritarian regimes to crack down on Internet dissenters. (The Washington Post, 08.04.2014)

In this case, the journalist begins the note with generalization and solidarization with audience at once: "all of us heard" (regardless of whether the reader knows this point of view and whether he divides it, it is presented as obviously known and true). After this similar reception we use. Again rhetorically equating itself to audience, the author passes to a statement of the new position supplementing the previous message. Thus, nothing remains to the reader except how to agree at first with the first thought, and then with the second, because his such reaction is already latently put in the message.

Rumors play an important role in conflicts of different types: intergroup, international. Their significance is concerned with the fact that in modern society capabilities of conflicting parties to affect each other are quite restricted with legislative limits and public opinion. Such features of society encourage growth of significance of those methods of affection that are concerned with change of majority's ideas about conflict in a direction that is profitable for one of conflicting parties. Such changes are possible due to specially selected data spreading first through the mass media and through channels of informal communication. Rumors in this case become serious weapon in conflicts.

The occurrence of rumors in conflicts can be used for achievement of different goals. First, it is a discredit of an opponent in public opinion. So during the period of election campaign the frequency of rumors about various bents of the candidate increases. Moreover, if such rumor is interesting for reader, it becomes popular not only in mass media.

Provoking of population to act in profitable for one of the conflicting parties way is another function of rumors. The question is mass riots, strikes, rush demand for products and other actions. Rumors about absolute disappearance of products spread by opposition result in the situation when people by all the products causing price increase and deficit. Citizens lay the blame of such situation on authority who has power. Rumors of this type are easily recognized as opposed to other types,

e.g.,

The news of pro-Russian thugs trying to impose a tax on Jews first appeared on Wednesday morning on a small, local news website in eastern Ukraine called Novosti Donbassa. Along with a photo of a neo-Nazi throwing the Hitler salute, the website offered the story of three masked goons hanging around a synagogue in the city of Donetsk and handing out anti-Semitic fliers to local Jews. The site even ran a photo of the flier, which demanded that Jewish residents of Donetsk show up to «register», pay a fee of «50 American dollars», and offer proof of any property they own in the region. It all looked like a crude joke. But even though Novosti Donbassa is not the most reliable source, the story was apparently too scandalous to ignore. It ricocheted around the Internet on Wednesday before winding up in the Israeli press and, finally, on the website of USA Today. By Thursday evening, the article had reached U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, who commented on it during high-level talks in Geneva. (Time, 18.04.2014)

In the example given above it is visible that the rumor created, probably, and been at the disposal of the edition taking not quite neutral position subsequently has already been widespread in space of traditional communication by means of electronic means of communication and began to be perceived already as sensational news (Busygina & Zheltukhina, 2015). Than more widely rumors of this kind disperse, especially they are capable to cause strong reputation damage to that party of the conflict, which in them is exposed in negative light. In this concrete case it is about the armed opposition, however by means of similar information diversions also the conflicts of other type can be solved (for example, pre-election rivalry or business disputes). In process of rumor distribution it can acquire additional details and lose attribution. If one edition reprinting the unchecked message can refer to his previous source, then already the following, for example, at all will ignore need of attribution, thereby having transferred rumors to the category of allegedly reliable news.



In mass media, rumors also function to misrepresent the opponent or audience. Even Genghis Khan used such method spreading rumors about great strength of his army that decreased competitive spirit of his enemies. Misrepresentation can happen also in understatement of personal power and possibilities.

All Rumors can encourage both decrease in the level of excitement, anxiety of individuals and activation of their actions, mass media in their turn influence their circulation. It happens in such way: firstly, absence or lack of information about something in mass media encourages appearance and spread of rumors on this topic. Rumors in such case fill the informational vacuum adding the image of the event. In a case, when mass media are sources of rumors that print poorly checked information (with commercial purposes or with the purpose to attract attention) this information reaches people faster and the percentage of people who trust it is increasing.

e.g.,

Around 500 people are to simulate sex at Old Palace Yard in Westminster on Friday, as MPs debate the recent changes to UK pornography regulations and the effective banning of certain sex acts the government deems morally damaging. The Audiovisual Media Services Regulations 2014 banned «physical restraint», «strong physical and verbal abuse» and potentially «life-threatening» acts from being depicted in online porn on 1 December, in a barrage of ambiguous new rules. #PornProtest will attempt to break the Guinness World Record for «face-sitting» (an act that could face censorship) and hold a «Sex Factor» game show, both using fully-clothed participants. The protest is the brainchild of Sex Worker of the Year 2013 Charlotte Rose, who said: «These laws are not only sexist but they taking away people's choices without consent. Personal liberty is what we are fighting for on Friday which no one has the right to take away from somebody else». «Pornography is the canary in the coalmine of free speech: it is the first freedom to die», – renowned obscenity lawyer Myles Jackman told London24. «If this assault on liberty is allowed to go unchallenged, other freedoms will fall as a consequence». (The Independent, 10.12.2014)

In this example, it is about an action, which was widely advertised, however actually has not taken place. Nevertheless, rumors about its fast carrying out have widely dispersed in the press that promoted intensification of actions both supporters, and opponents of the adopted legislative amendments. Information on such actions (social and political, religious, ethnic or gender painted character), even not confirmed officially, is capable to lead to strengthening of activity of the groups occupying the opposite points of view on certain questions. Therefore, the rumor given above could cause surge in activity not only among defenders of the rights of workers of the sex industry, but also among the ultraconservatives supporting the ban of pornography. In the same way, for example, rumors about holding a mass meeting of radical political party can cause rough reaction in the activists taking an opposite position. Moreover, rumors about holding concert and other actions, objectionable to representatives of the prevailing faiths, often provoke aggression flashes, which can lead to mass riots and collisions.

In addition to this, we must not forget that mass media make a decisive step to fade the rumor presenting detailed and clear information on the corresponding topic.

Conclusion

So as a result of specialized literature and facts it is possible to distinguish 2 main functions of rumors in printed mass media: informational and affecting (the affect on the recipient through the announcement of particular information) Informational and affecting functions of rumors in modern media discourse are realized in following directions: filling of informational vacuum, adding the image of the event, forming of identity, increasing of homogeneity of opinions, control over conflicts, discredit of opponent, provoking of recipient to activate actions, decreasing of recipient`s level of excitement, anxiety, misrepresentation of opponent.

Mass media trying to realize the function of estimation and critics create and spread rumors themselves, use actively pseudo arguments and lie instead of exposure of various rumors, pseudo arguments, lies. In such situation mass media, reach their goals deliberately affecting mind and behavior of a person. The research of techniques of mass media to affect recipient creating and spreading rumors is a perspective direction for study of affect on consciousness and subconsciousness of person in modern media space.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications and recommendations for future studies are as follows. Based on findings of this study we can compare media rumors in different media cultures. It should be noted that our future study could form integrated communicative space of rumorology. It is recommended that linguistic, cultural, philosophical and historical development of research should include complex methods, which were integrated into research process and should be discussed by experts in their fields. The next step in the development of rumorology as an independent research direction will be the creation of basis of media rumors in different media cultures.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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