

FRAME “PROISHESTVIE” AND IDEOLOGY: ADAPTING TO NEW SOCIOCULTURAL REALITY VIA CONCEPTUAL BLENDING

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Abstract

The selection of accidents depicted in news and the prominence of certain details, characteristics and evaluations all change according to socio-cultural background and the norms, rules and values adopted in a society in a certain period of time and its ideologies.

Since news about accidents depicts and speculates about events, which disrupt norms, such events are reflected in the ideological discourse not only in a manner which shows what happened, but also how this is evaluated by ordinary people and governmental bodies, which norms this event disrupts and which are values of a society considered to be abused. Accident or “proisshestvie” in Russian, the event which depiction in news items interests us, is defined in dictionaries as an unexpected event, which breaks the usual pattern of things and disturbs the usual course of life, as an unpleasant event. Events-accidents are generally negatively evaluated because they not only change situations but they do it by breaking norms and this has negative consequences. Assessment of an event as an accident could be subjective or objective depending on whether it breaks socio-cultural norms or norms adopted by a group of people or by individuals. The descriptions of accidents published by newspapers usually break norms adopted by society in general and thus evoke our conceptualisation of these norms, making us analyse and/or accept subconsciously the values, beliefs and attitudes which are shared by people in society. Through the juxtaposition of an accident (negative) and rescue measures (positive), represented in a certain way in a news item a reader is persuaded to accept such “positive” things and along with them social identities of “members of rescue team”, social procedures, social relations, power relations which are implied. News stories about accidents require and help us to identify ourselves in terms of belonging to a certain ideological and socio-cultural space but as I shall argue in this paper they not only reflect but at the same time implicitly impose ideologies which accord with power relations in the society at a certain stage in history.

The central moment in ideology operation analysis is identification and interpretation of assumptions or expectations incorporating ideologies, ‘common-sense’/typical features of discourse which are taken for granted. Structures of such expectations/assumptions and their verbalisation can be explored by means of frame analysis of discourse. Frame here is understood as an idealised cognitive model of sociocultural phenomena or a shared cultural model. The frame “Proisshestvie” forming a basis for production and comprehension of news about accidents is expected to contain components of a thematic frame, which are selected and organised in accordance with a narrative frame. Such a narrative frame is ideologically dependent in terms of which types of accidents are chosen to be represented in news stories and how they are presented (what components are included or excluded; in which order they are presented) and how they are interpreted and verbalised. The frame “Proisshestvie” is an overly simplistic cognitive representation of a whole class of events-accidents, which are verbalised in news items in the Russian press. Having analysed more than 400 news items about

accidents from the Russian central/major newspapers dated from 1957 to 2006 we could conclude that the frame “Proisshestvie” was verbalised in news items in a relatively stable way during the observed period (some variation has been observed) with the exception of news items about accidents from the Russian press of mid 90s. The central part of this paper is devoted to the analysis of these texts.

After the collapse of the Soviet system and the birth of “freedom” in Russia, news about accidents became very frequent and started to be an important part of life. In 90s Russian society is characterised by an enormous shift of values, beliefs and norms. Having analysed 180 news stories from that period we can conclude that the news items often didn’t reflect or impose the ideology of some official social institution or the government but rather interpreted events-accidents as if competing for describing the most unbelievable and problematic types of accidents, which constituted a part of the real life in Russia at that time. The ideology realised in the news about accidents discourse could be rather called the ideology of a transition period, often representing chaos or anarchy and even rules of a criminal world. Such a discourse was problematic and creative at the same time. The events-accidents described were not typical comparing to the ones people had got used to. People had to constantly adapt and combine their knowledge of the frame “Proisshestvie” and a number of other cultural models they shared and evoked in the process of understanding such texts. Despite of their unusual structure and content newspapers and readers were still able to construe and define such “creative” news items as news about accidents. In this paper I shall attempt to explain this phenomenon in terms of the conceptual blending theory and use a number of examples to show how the “creative” news items about accidents reflected and contributing into shaping the norms, beliefs and values adopted in the Russian society at that time.

Keywords : accident, frame, cultural model, discourse, ideology, conceptual blending theory, mental space, compression, emergent structure.

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