

LINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF CORPORATE MEDIA DISCOURSE

ASPECTOS LINGÜÍSTICOS DO DISCURSO NA MÍDIA CORPORATIVA

ASPECTOS LINGÜÍSTICOS DEL DISCURSO EN LOS MEDIOS CORPORATIVOS

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ABSTRACT: An effective channel for representing the corporate values of a commercial enterprise is corporate media. The study aims at analyzing the linguistic aspects of corporate media discourse and its historical forms, determining critical trends in the transformation of axiological models of corporate publications of a commercial enterprise in the context of the economic paradigm shift of internal communications of an organization. Linguistics and axiological aspects of the media discourse of a commercial enterprise are considered utilizing an example of corporate publications of the Belgorod Power Engineering Plant, the United Metallurgical Company, and the *Priorskoye* agricultural holding. The study results make it possible to redefine the criteria for value models of media discourse, contribute to the study of the specifics of internal communications of a commercial enterprise and corporate culture.

KEYWORDS: Corporate media. Media discourse. Linguistic aspects. Axiological models.

RESUMO: *Um canal eficaz para representar os valores corporativos de uma empresa comercial é a mídia corporativa. O estudo tem como objetivo analisar os aspectos lingüísticos do discurso da mídia corporativa e suas formas históricas, determinando tendências críticas na transformação de modelos axiológicos de publicações corporativas de uma empresa comercial no contexto da mudança do paradigma econômico da comunicação interna de uma organização. Aspectos lingüísticos e axiológicos do discurso da mídia de uma empresa comercial são considerados utilizando um exemplo de publicações corporativas da Belgorod Power Engineering Plant, da United Metallurgical Company e da holding agrícola Priorskoye. Os resultados do estudo permitem redefinir os critérios dos modelos de valor do discurso midiático, contribuir para o estudo das especificidades da comunicação interna de uma empresa comercial e da cultura corporativa.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Mídia corporativa. Discurso midiático. Aspectos lingüísticos. Modelos axiológicos.*

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RESUMEN: *Un canal eficaz para representar los valores corporativos de una empresa comercial son los medios corporativos. El estudio tiene como objetivo analizar los aspectos lingüísticos del discurso de los medios corporativos y sus formas históricas, determinando tendencias críticas en la transformación de modelos axiológicos de publicaciones corporativas de una empresa comercial en el contexto del cambio de paradigma económico de las comunicaciones internas de una organización. Los aspectos lingüísticos y axiológicos del discurso mediático de una empresa comercial se consideran utilizando un ejemplo de publicaciones corporativas de Belgorod Power Engineering Plant, United Metallurgical Company y Prioskolye. Los resultados del estudio permiten redefinir los criterios para los modelos de valor del discurso mediático, contribuir al estudio de las especificidades de las comunicaciones internas de una empresa comercial y cultura corporativa.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Medios corporativos. Discurso mediático. Aspectos lingüísticos. Modelos axiológicos.*

Introduction

The content of corporate media is traditionally formed with an allowance for their communication and production functionality (LAPINA, 2004; MURZIN, 2005; ROMASHOVA, 2015; JACOBS, 2018; OLTARZHEVSKYI, 2019). A number of researchers treat them as a tool ensuring a continuous circulation of information and news flows in the company, a support of corporate culture and employees' high feeling of loyalty to the company (BRACKER, SCHUHKNECHT, ALTMPEPPEN, 2017; VOLKOVA, 2018), as well as a marketing tool (OLTARZHEVSKYI, 2013; NARIN'YANI, 2017) and even as a socio-material resource (HOOF, BOELL, 2019).

The formation of the agenda of corporate publication of a commercial enterprise, in particular, the choice of texts for placement in the media, is dependent not only on pragmatic, but also value factors. The selection of information for planned materials is carried out via thematization and rubrication, contextualization (for example, representation of an employee as a subject, object or resource of professional activity), semiotic means (stylistic and rhetorical means, visual means), objects of representation (people, technologies, achievements, production indicators, reporting information, etc.). Editorial decision taking is motivated not only by the norms and rules of journalistic, editorial and PR activities, but also by the value-laden ideas of the editorial staff and publisher about the significance and importance of a particular model of representing individuals, processes, brands, goods, etc.

Since values are sociocultural phenomena, the use of axiological models of media discourse is historically contingent.

It is our belief that at different historical stages in corporate media discourse, different axiological models dominated, according to which the same subject of discourse was represented in different ways, with different details, contexts and focus.

The axiological aspects of corporate media discourse not only represent the tenets of the management of a commercial enterprise regarding corporate governance, but they can also act as a serious factor in the image of a company, as well as the “corporate outlook” of its employees (SEMASHKINA, 2020). We see it fit to make notice of the axiological differentiation of corporate media discourse and its historical forms.

Materials and Methods

In order to identify the main axiological models employed in corporate media discourse, studies are undertaken of the content of corporate publications of large commercial enterprises.

The study is based on the traditional document analysis method. This will provide insight into the main axiological models of corporate media discourse implemented in publications. The content and specificity of these models will be discussed in more detail below.

The paper of the *Belenergomash* plant (in historical retrospect, it has changed its name several times) is quite typical for the entire category of corporate publications in terms of editorial classification, subject area, format, frequency, circulation and some other parameters meaningful for corporate publications. We have analyzed 52 issues of the newspaper of 1970, 47 issues of the newspaper of 1999, 16 issues of 2003, as well as 72 issues of 2014-2019. It was in studies using the method of traditional document analysis and the method of continuous sampling. As units of analysis, we used headings, topics, rhetorical-stylistic and visual means of the language of publications as the units for analysis, which together are the key tools for translating corporate values.

The newspaper of the Belgorod agricultural holding *Prioskolye* is also rather a typical corporate print publication of the agricultural and industrial poultry industry. Within the framework of this study, 161 issues of the Prioskolya Vestnik newspaper were analyzed as of from September 2006 to January 2020.

Literature review

The study of axiological aspects of corporate media discourse requires a preliminary definition of the concept of “media discourse”.

Two approaches to the definition of media discourse are differentiated by E. A. Kozhemyakin (2010): in the first case, media discourse is understood as a specific type of verbal and cogitative activity, characteristic only for the media environment; according to the second definition, it is any kind of discourse realized by means of the media. Accordingly, media discourse is interpreted as a “thematically focused, socio-culturally contextualized verbal and cogitative activity in the mass media space” (KOZHEMYAKIN, 2010, 14).

A. V. Polonskiy suggests media discourse as a dynamic information environment, “within which matures the knowledge about the world, social relations and ideologies, experienced and entrenched in the minds of people in the form of behavioral and moral” (POLONSKIY, 2009, 152).

Based on the analysis of the values of well-known world companies, Barchiesi and La Bella (2014) define “five independent value-based orientations: customer / user; employees; economic and financial growth; excellence and social responsibility”. Many researchers overly focus on the processes of forming corporate values in modern organizations (Bracker, Schuhknecht, Altmeppen, 2017; Sinyaeva, 2018), as well as the ratio of personal and corporate values (Kabalina, Reshetnikova, 2014; Zaytseva, Koblyakova, 2018). The appeal to corporate values is associated with the axiologization of management. We do not purport to give self-authored definition of the concept of “value”, but we focus on the tendency to dehumanize corporate media content.

According to A. I. Prigozhin, “values are such ideas about the perfection of something important, which are constantly guided by those who strive for excellence. In other words, these are the deep vectors of life, directing people’s activities at all its secondary, tertiary, etc. levels” (PRIGOZHIN, 2007, 3). We will take this definition as a basic one.

Results and Discussion

The first issue of the *Belgorodsky Kotelshchik* newspaper was published in 1957. In 1977, the plant paper changed its name and became known as *Trudovaya Slava*, which existed until October 2003. In 2013, the management of the enterprise (ZAO “Energomash

(Belgorod) – BZEM”, since August 2014 – OOO “Belenergomash – BZEM”) decided to resume the issue of a corporate publication titled *Energomash*.

Note that during all periods of its existence, the corporate newsletter tried to give information about foremost workers, prospects for the plant development and new construction activity. Accordingly, the set of corporate values is represented in the media through themes, contextualization with the help of visual techniques, as well as stylistic and rhetorical means of language.

In different periods of history, one can speak of the predominance of one or another axiological model of corporate media discourse: anthropocentric (in the center of which is laboring man, foremost workers); resource-centric (auxiliary aids exploited in the targeted activities of employees of the enterprise); effect-centric (focus on results, commercial success, accomplishments in production and enterprise’s competitive growth). Worthy of mention is that the anthropocentric model of corporate media discourse, in our opinion, is characteristic of the 1970s, the resource-centric model has become prevalent since about the beginning of the 1990s, and the effect-centric model has been actively used by corporate media from the 2010s through the present.

Pay attention to the content of the opening pages of the newspaper *Belgorodsky Kotelshchik* of 1970. During that period the newspaper was published once a week on four A3 pages. For the year, 52 issues of the factory newspaper had been published. In 31 of them the news (59.6% of all materials) about the best workers is featured on the front page. Sometimes stories are put under the heading *People of Our Plant*, more often the heading is absent, but the form of presenting remains: a portrait at the workplace (photo) and a few lines telling directly about the very working man. A best worker is traditionally presented as one of the workers of the plant, and their activities are characterized in a lofty positive strain (“great responsibilities”, “to work better”, “advanced”) and placed in the state-ideological macro-context, more abstract and general than the industrial context of the enterprise. A frequent case is the combination of the state-ideological and industrial contexts, however, the emphasis is also placed on the positive characteristics and an attainment of excellence of a particular person. A number of examples demonstrate the attention of newspaper editorial staff to working conditions of the enterprise’s employees and mark them as workers positively. In this case, the personality of a worker no longer fits into the macrocontext; an emphasis is placed rather on the microcontext of performing employment duties. An interesting approach to combining macro- and microcontexts of the representation of the worker’s personality is illustrated in the examples, where evaluation of the workers’

performance of employment duties correlates with ideological and official-industrial contexts. A number of other examples comprises a full detail of positive performance review of a leading worker: *хорошая работница* (performance review proper), *активная общественница* (social activity) and *заместитель секретаря парткома* (party activity).

It is characteristic that photographs and sketchy information or essays about best performers are also put on other pages of the newspaper (usually 2-3 such publications in each issue). According to our opinion, it is indicative of anthropocentricity of corporate media discourse.

For 1999, 47 issues of the factory newspaper had been published, which had already been titled *Trudovaya Slava* by that time. As usual, the publication was once a week on four A3 pages. The analysis of the first pages of the newspaper shows that sketchy information about working people gradually cease to be “front-page”. Out of 47 issues, they are present on the front page only in nine cases (19.1%). At the same time, the form of presentation of news somewhat changes: the photograph is accompanied by a more extended text, it is already about a quarter of the page in volume. Information about people is put on 2-3 pages of the in-house publication, but even here not individuals often appear, but entire labor collectives.

During that period, the opening pages of the plant paper more often published various resolutions and reports from meetings of the Board of Directors and shareholders’ meetings (34% of all materials). Publications usually dwelt on topical problems (workplace morale, the financial standing of the enterprise, workload, etc.). Here, we may speak of replacing the anthropocentric model in the corporate media discourse with the resource-centric model, with its emphasis on the resources of the organization, allowing it to implement current production activities.

The information and analytical edition of OAO *Energomashcorporatsiya*, JSC – the paper of Russian power machine builders *Energomash* – has been published since 1999, printed in various cities of Russia with a size print run of 10 thousand copies. The newspaper is published monthly on eight A3 pages. During the year, 17 issues were published (in May, June, July, October and December – 2 issues each), materials about people were present on the front page only once – in issue 13 (96) for October 2003 (7.9% of all materials).

During the year, the front pages of the information analysis publication *Energomash* were systematically occupied by official materials. Pictures are mostly group photos. The content of the issues proper is, as a rule, information about installation forcing and facility modifying, maintaining a competitive picture, growth in production, etc. There are a lot of portrait photographs in the newspaper, but they are small in size, usually placed on 3-6 pages,

are static and of the same type, which together is indicative of a shift in focus in corporate media discourse from anthropocentric to effect-centric and resource-centric models.

Contemporary plant paper *Energomash* (corporate edition of OOO *Belenergomash* – *BZEM*) is a monthly A3 format publication of four pages. It is replete mainly with information of the enterprise's records of achievement and project operation. Information about people of labor is put on the pages of the plant paper, but in general, the corporate media discourse is represented mainly by an effect-centric model, which is characterized by an emphasis on corporate reports and productive and managerial efficiency.

In February 2020, the *Belenergomash* plant became part of the United Metallurgical Company. The main vector of further corporate development – customer focus – prevails in the information policy of the enterprise, corporate media and external communications, in particular, in the monthly issues of the electronic corporate magazine *OMK Komanda*, the corporate newspaper *Teritoriya OMK*, press releases published on the official website of the enterprise, and in the corporate newspaper *Energomash*.

It has been established that as a result of synergy, a new, “client-centric” model is dominant in the corporate media discourse of a large metallurgical commercial enterprise. The issues of the *Territoriya OMK* newspaper visually demonstrate it. Distinctive is the press release posted on the official website of the company. In the text part the word *клиент* / *client* has been found 7 times in different variations (*сервисы для клиентов; с клиентами; для своих клиентов, etc.*), in reference part – additional 9 times (*статья ближе к конечным клиентам; привлекательные цены, в формировании которых участвуют сами клиенты; с учетом потребностей клиентов, etc.*).

As a refinement definition this model can be considered *to be represented by a set of channels and means of communication that form and broadcast specialized media content intended for a specific target audience – the organization's clients. Note that this model has a demonstrable effect on the system of internal and external communications of a commercial enterprise.*

Of course, publications about working people are present on the pages of shop papers, official website of an enterprise and in social networks. But in general, the anthropocentric model for corporate media discourse is not typical.

The content of the corporate media discourse of the *Vestnik Prioskolya* newspaper is characterized by a considerable influence of the territorial affiliation of the enterprise. The *Prioskolye* agricultural holding started up in the Belgorod Region with the active support of the regional administration. The same mechanism was later

implemented in developing large production objects of the company in the Altai Territory and in the Tambov Region.

The newspaper covered the starting of new production facilities, the activities of structural divisions, a network of sales offices in the regions and in the largest cities of the country. Information from the regional companies was regularly placed on its pages. The positive influence of the company's activities on the development of regions, a substantial social and economic contribution were always highlighted. The same emphasis was always made by the administration, the heads of the territories. This equates to the dominance (almost from the very foundation of the enterprise) of the geocentric model of corporate media discourse, along with resource-and effect-centric models.

As a refinement definition, the model of corporate media discourse can be considered as *“geocentric” in which the territorial belonging of an organization has a marked impact on the formation of the corporate values and priorities, and representation in the media is carried out with the active influence of local, regional features of information policy. Internal and external communications of a commercial enterprise are also built taking into account regional specifics.*

Conclusion

Corporate media discourse represents not only the factual aspects of a company, but also its values, axiological priorities and “ideology”. Transformations in the field of the mission and axiological priorities of companies affect the content of corporate media discourse, therefore, the study of ways of representing value attitudes in corporate media discourse bring us to the conclusions not only about the content of the company's discursive practices, but also the value aspects of its activities.

Using the example of the employee plant paper *Belenergomash*, we have retraced the change in the axiological model of corporate media discourse, depending on the current economic priorities of the company.

The study highlights the three main axiological models employed in the media discourse of the publication: anthropocentric, resource-centric and effect-centric. Depending on the current economic situation, the focus of representation shifted from an individual to the company's resources and a commercial effect.

The predominant anthropocentric model with a working man and foremost workers in its center was replaced by resource- and effect-centric models focused on commercial success, competitive growth and record achievements in production in different historical periods.

Using the example of corporate publications of the United Metallurgical Company and the *Priorskolye* agricultural holding, we have identified and analyzed the client-centric and geocentric models, which are also characterized by dehumanization of the media discourse of a commercial enterprise.

A promising direction of research in corporate media discourse is the determination of the entire range of verbal and visual indicators of anthropocentric, resource-centric and effect-centric models of media discourse, as well as in the development of a methodology for a comprehensive analysis of the representation of corporate values at the verbal and visual levels of the discourse of house publication.

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