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Information quality violations in the mass media and its impact on communication

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The Taxonomy of Language Means Breaking the Norm of Media News – an Analytical Tool to Assess the News Reporting



WHAT IS THE PRESENTATION ABOUT

- A) Society and Media
- B) News reporting
- C) Mass Communication Theory and **Normative Concept of Media**
- D) Normative Concept of Media and Theory of Law
- E) Normative Concept of Media and **STYLISTICS**
- F) **Information Quality Concept**
- G) Grant project *The Taxonomy of Language Means Breaking the Norm of Media News – an Analytical Tool to Assess the News Reporting*



Society and Media

media organizations – operate in the public space
→ ability to shape public opinion

the relationship between media organizations and the recipient =
asymmetric

well-organized institution with financial and human resources and
access to information resources X the recipient



society demands from the media a socially responsible behavior

→ regulation of media activities:

- formally, through legislation
- informally, by the pressure coming from the social space
(institutions, associations, interest groups, individuals)

(McQuail, 1999)



NEWS reporting

- product of media organizations' own activities
- one of the major types of media contents
- efforts to maximize the viewership (readership)

→ frequency of television and radio news reporting programs

→ placed in the prime-time (or on the first pages in print media)

→ ads on radio and television news reporting programs during the broadcast

→ establishment of special news reporting channels or web portals



The properties of news reporting

- presented as **reflection of current reality**
- as such attributed by the positive values:
truthful, objective and balanced



claimed that:

- a) the message meets strictly informative function → to compensate information contents of sender and audience
- b) recipients are offered interpretations of news, the preferred reading



This part of media production is given specific attention by

- **social sciences and humanities**
(communication theories and theories of mass communication)
- in the field of linguistics by **stylistics**
- in broader social context by the **jurisprudence**

Based on **the analytical tools** you can:

- capture deviations from the proclaimed values of the news reporting + breaches of standards of objectivity
- determine the value orientation of media (the ethical principles of journalistic work), social norms, or even respect for the legal rules



Normative concept of media and mass communication theory

- **relationship between society and the media** → requirements of the socially responsible behavior of media:
 - respect for the public interest
 - supporting plurality of views, including minorities
 - rejection of socially pathological phenomena
 - criteria for quality of information
- within the normative concept of media, **special attention is paid to news reporting**
(McQuail 2005)
- quality criteria of news reporting production: **concept of information quality principles by Jörgen Westerståhl**



The position of the **normative concept** in the field of mass communication and social sciences

- in the Czech environment **outside the mainstream theory of mass communication**
- the interpretative **approach aimed at recipients** (the audience)
- the object of interest is **not focused on the agent of communication**



Normative concept of media and Theory of Law

LAW = a social normative system

- reflects the need to reduce the entropy of the society (disorder of competing human interests, behavior, satisfaction of needs)
- as the prescriptive regulatory system - protects individual interests, providing protection against other interests and authoritatively resolves conflicts between them

**Theory of law is compliant with the
normative concept of mass
communication.**



Legal regulation of the media in the Czech Republic

- **media activities are regulated through laws, including enforcement of the state**
- **general laws** (criminal, civil, administrative, labor, financial law)
- **specific laws** regulating certain aspects of the media or having the effect of their actions (regulation of advertising, free access to information, copyright law, etc.)
- **media laws** (The Press Act, on Czech Television, on Czech Radio)
- **Boards of public service media: authorities, with the public's right to control the media**



Media self-regulation

- crucial **reflection of normative theory of mass communication**
- source of legitimation of the quality requirements in the media

- **Ethical codes of media:**

- **accepted by all media organizations (electronic, print media)**
- **published on the websites of media organizations**
- **represent the principle of self-regulation**
- **media organizations claim to respect objectivity, fairness/balance, neutrality**

CZ: derived from the Code of Ethics for Journalists of the Syndicate of Journalists of the Czech Republic

- **if the code of ethics publicly declared, it is legitimate to require its compliance!! - judgments of the Supreme Administrative Court**
- **to justify their decisions the Courts use linguistic theory**



Normative concept of media and **STYLISTICS**

Functional Stylistics considers **FUNCTION** as the basic pragmatic factor of producing the utterances

→adequate, stylistically unmarked language means

→composition

→themes and content organization

The **function** is the basis for determining/establishing **stylistic areas** (as sets of stylistic norms).



News reporting stylistic area and the **normative concept of media**

Czech (and Slovak) stylistics:

- **informative function** as the **basis for news reporting** (Čechová 2003, Bečka 1992, Mistrík 1985)
- informative essence of news reporting is the basis of setting the **standards for the style type**
→ neutrality, factuality of linguistic means, the lack of implicit and explicit subjectivity, clarity
- **linguistic view of informative function** = pure attempt establish equality with respect to the information held by the emitter and the recipient of a message + exclusion of formative/persuasive intentions (Jílek 2009)



INFORMATION QUALITY CONCEPT

Principles of information quality (objectivity)

by Jörgen Westerståhl -

a tool of assessing linguistic means

Qualitative criteria include:

- method of selection and retrieval of information,
- work with information in terms of their distribution
- **linguistic representation of information**

Language means used in the news reporting:

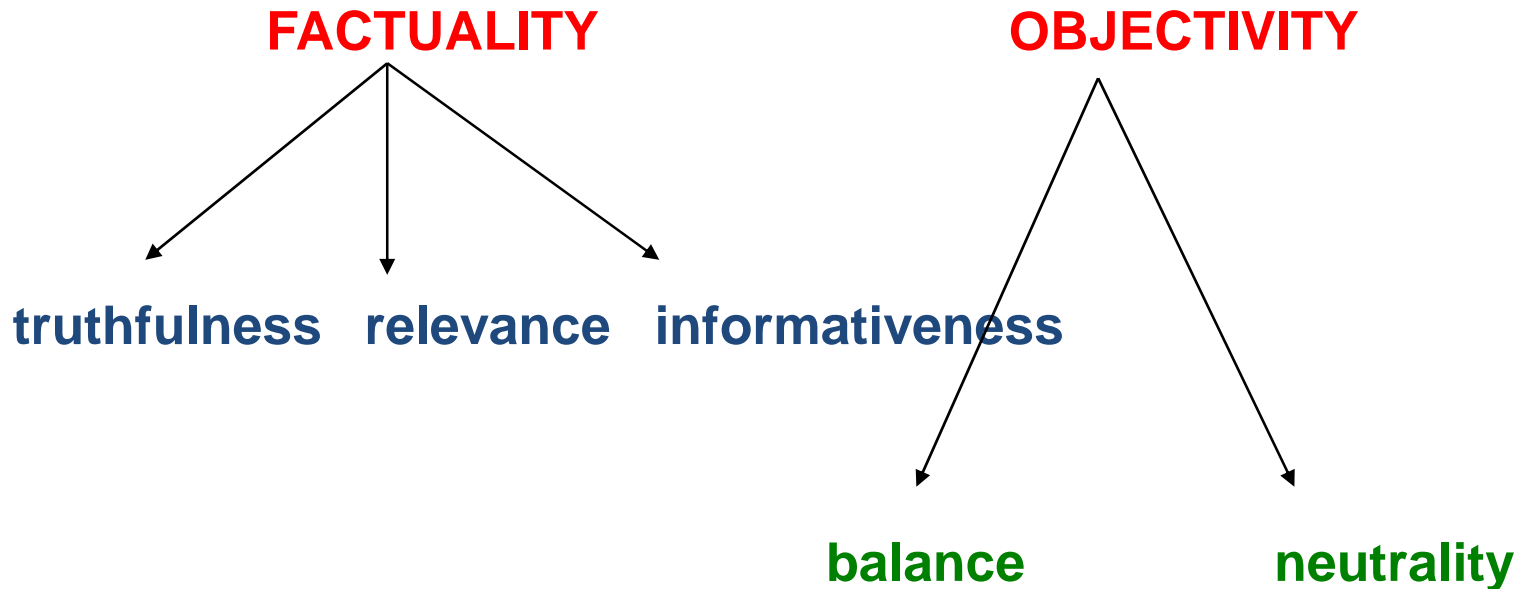
- the **UNMARKED** means that DO NOT VIOLATE the quality of information
- the **MARKED** means that VIOLATE the quality of information



Information quality concept

- established by Jörgen Westerståhl
- fully compatible with linguistic view of informative function

Basic value factors



Westerståhl, J. Objective News Reporting: General Premises. *Communication Research*. 1983, vol. 10, pp. 403-424.



TRUTHFULNESS

Requirements:

- presentation of events **without comments**, or clear separation from comments
- accuracy of reports
- completeness of reports

COMMENTS ← **marked language means:**

- evaluating expressive means (wordformational, lexical)
- context expressivity
- means expressing irony
- emphasizing (importance of the information)

ACCURACY ← **marked language means:**

- phraseology, metaphors and metonymy
- vocabulary with indefinite semantics *masses, circles, public*

COMPLETENESS ← **marked language means:**

- failure to comply the text pattern
- the lack of response (direct or context) to one of the questions

Who? When? Where? What?



RELEVANCE

- **selection of information** to be published
- inclusion of information on **a specific place** in news reporting programs/news reporting sites
- work with information, thematization of information (area which is given to them), proportionality of partial information about the event



media can be generally classified into **serious, popular, tabloid**



INFORMATIVENESS

- provides smooth reception and perception

← **marked language means:**

- fast speech tempo
- territorially limited vocabulary, sociolects, historicisms, scientific terms, abbreviations, acronyms, neologisms
- large and complex sentences structures



BALANCE

Prerequisites:

- putting opposing views in the form of quotations or paraphrases, which are given in the same or corresponding time ratio, space and form

← **marked means:**

- combination of quotes and paraphrases
- spatial disparity between opinion and opposing view



NEUTRALITY

assumes:

- **non-emotionality** of expression
- the use of **standard language**
- the use of **neutral** language means



The causes of violations of information quality

1) Institutional causes

- **commercial interests** → increase the audience of media content → reflected in the interest of advertisers and the price of advertising products
- **political interests** → assume a recipient who does not have the time or knowledge to navigate through a complex reality, or to think about the meaning of events



- **topics applied to fundamental human motives (crime, scandals)**
- **socially important topics are presented as entertainment**

2) **Individual causes**, pressure of time and the space provided



Violation of normative principles of information quality (objectivity, and truthfulness, relevance, balance, neutrality).

The result is the penetration of **non-reporting intentions**, especially persuasion, acquisition and entertainment.

News reporting effectively **transferred to the sphere of commentaries**, analytical genres (publicism)



Hypotheses of the grant project *The Taxonomy of Language Means Breaking the Norm of Media News – an Analytical Tool to Assess the News Reporting*

- a) It is possible to establish **taxonomies of language means** belonging to individual language plans within internal linguistics and on the level of text.
- b) The taxonomy used for our research purposes will pay **special attention to language means showing a potential to implement into the news reporting a function other than informative** or to make the message of the news reporting incomprehensible.

Listed will be the means showing potential **to break the norm of news reporting texts.**

The proposed taxonomy will be a **universally applicable tool** to identify language means interfering with the rules of news reporting information quality.



The **taxonomy as a tool**

The taxonomy will be used to analyze the TV news broadcasted by **public-service television** in comparison with TV news broadcasted by the most widely watched **commercial television** station TV Nova.

For both stations the analysis will identify actual **language means breaking the norm of the news reporting** and the frequency of individual trespasses.

The description of **individual kinds of trespasses against the norm** will be based upon mutual comparison of both stations with regard of the differences and/or similarities of the language means used.



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