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## **SIMPLIFICATION OF LANGUAGE IN POLITICAL DISCOURSES PUBLISHED IN TABLOIDS**

**Veronika Veverková\***

*Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Faculty of Arts, Department of Journalism,  
B. Slančíkovej 1, 949 74 Nitra, Slovak Republic*

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### **Abstract**

This article focuses on the issue of simplification of language in political discourses in the Slovak tabloids. It is particularly based on current criticism of simplification of language used by journalists in Slovak media. The aim of this article is to point out not only to negative aspects of respective language tendency, but also to possible positive aspects of this phenomenon. Within the context of language simplification, this article focuses on changes that have already been empirically proved by Slovak experts. The aim of this article is not to point out to new language phenomena in discourses with political theme published in the Slovak tabloids, but to point out to the context of their origin and application in the Slovak tabloids, as well as to outline an issue of their (non-)legitimacy in tabloids.

*Keywords:* language, politainment, political news, Slovak press, tabloid

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### **1. Introduction**

Nowadays, entertainment is one of the key requirements when creating mass media and journalistic discourses. They are part of news, analyses and discussions in many Slovak media, where each form of discourse is also assigned adequate designation. In case of news this type of discourse is called infotainment; an entertaining media discourse which should educate recipients (e.g. analyses) are referred to as edutainment; linking of entertainment with the political issue is referred to as politainment and linking of entertainment and political confrontation is among the experts referred to as confrontainment [M. Pravdová, *Infotainment, politainment, edutainment aneb K jazyku masových médií*, Naše řeč, 2003, <http://nase-rec.ujc.cas.cz/archiv.php?art=7741>, accessed 08.07.2015]. Above mentioned names of mass media or journalist phenomena show that current mass media production is full of entraining forms of any journalist communication. From the language point of view in this context, Markéta Pravdová from the Institution of Czech Language named the current mass media era as the era of ‘-tainments’ (this name can be also applied in Slovak language, as far as denomination of respective phenomena is identical

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\*E-mail: vveverkova@ukf.sk

in both languages- note V.V.) [<http://nase-rec.ujc.cas.cz/archiv.php?art=7741>]. Even at the time when the news service was just shaping, during which, in comparison with its relevant information saturation, started to contain still more and more entertaining elements, there were negative voices of both professional and laic public that condemned this phenomenon, later called as infotainment. Besides this, a factor of entertainment was also transferred to other, herein already mentioned types of mass media/journalist discourses and created another forms of ‘-tainment’ already listed herein.

Despite the fact that entertainment is one of the functions of journalism, it was used out of publicist discourses in tabloid press, namely in the form of crosswords, horoscopes, etc. [1]. Entertainment as a part of journalist discourses has been gradually formed within the tabloid media and exactly separate forms of media entertainment communication (‘-tainment’) have become their natural part. However, the question is what is considered to be really natural for the tabloid press and what exceed the limits of naturalness. This question is dealt by many media theorists, while the most often object of their analysis is particularly a question of exceeding the level of naturalness in terms of exceeding limits of ethics or professional journalistic principles and requirements. However, with penetration of ‘-tainments’ into the (tabloid) press, not only thematic and semantic elements of entertainment penetrate, but also new ways of use of language expressive means are formed, the role of which is to simplify journalistic discourses and to make them more entertaining. These elements are perceived differently. According to the Czech linguist Jaroslav Bartošek, they are “... *welcomed and required by some people as a freedom and aversion to genre bondage, and criticized by others as negligence, illiteracy or disrespect to the language*” [J. Bartošek, *Tlak profese – specifický faktor ovlivňující jazyk žurnalistiky*, Naše řeč, 2002, <http://nase-rec.ujc.cas.cz/archiv.php?art=7673>]. It means that Bartošek points out to perceiving this change of using the language in journalist discourses from the genre point of view. However, journalistic discourse is not created only on the basis of formal, genre requirements, but the requirements on journalistic work connected with the topic being processed have significant impact on the way which word and by which method it will be used together for communication with a recipient. Besides this, making of journalistic discourses more entertaining cannot be perceived from the language point of view only within the intentions of genres, because not each ‘-tainment’ is bound to genre character tic of journalistic discourses. Infotainment and edutainment can be considered as ‘genre-tainments’. Another two ‘-tainments’ - politainment and confrontainment, are types of connection of entertainment in media with specific thematically focused discourses, namely texts focused on political theme. Therefore, from the language point of view these ‘-tainments’ cannot be evaluated only within the limits of genre specification of journalistic communication texts.

The aim of this article is to point out to potential positives and negatives of simplification of language used in media communication designated as politainment on the basis of available theories about journalistic language and

tabloid press within the context of journalistic requirements on processing the political topics. We particularly focused on an issue of language simplification in press in order to point out to elementary questions of this issue not influenced by various technological determinants of mass media communication which are typical for electronic media. We were particularly interested in occurrence of this phenomenon in tabloid periodic press, where politainment is considered to be a typical element.

## **2. Impact of politics and mass media on simplification of language of political discourses**

According to the Slovak media expert Samuel Brečka, political communication is within media research analysed from two perspectives, namely: how mass media communication affects politics and, vice versa, how politics affects mass media communication [2]. This way of examination can be applied also in case of question of language requirement in creation of political discourses published in media. It means that the issue of language simplification in the context of political journalistic discourses can be analysed in two ways, namely: how the level of presentation of politics by its representatives in the country affects language level of political communication texts published in press, but also how language requirements of mass media affect presentation of politics in the country. The question is, whether the language of politicians affects the language of political discourses published in media or whether the language of mass media affects language level of speeches of politicians.

The first aspect of analysis of simplification of language of journalistic communication texts dealing with political topic is closely connected with the question of public presentation of the political questions. The most relevant channel for this communication is mass media which according to Andrea Chlebcová Kečková evoke interest of public in political topics [3]. The way how the political questions are presented, solved, and provided to media together with a thematic focus of specific political questions provided to media, affect thematic, content and language structure of a specific media discourse. It means that in this connection it is possible to perceive certain standards of political communication and presentation which besides other things have own language particularities being reflected in media. These standards can be designated as a culture of political communication. Of course, political communication cannot be understood only as a communication with public mediated by mass media, but it is also necessary to take into account standards of communication with public in different events or communication between political representatives, etc.

The way of realization of the political communication is closely related to requirements of political PR which is understood as: “... *non-violent, sophisticated and effective affecting of opinion of individuals, social groups and public ...*” [4]. Political PR is closely connected with political marketing. In general, marketing communication “... *leads to changes in the mental processes*

of the customer” [I. Polakevičová, *Application of transactional analysis in marketing research - models of the hierarchy of effects of marketing communication and structural analysis*, Prohuman: vedecko-odborný internetový časopis - sociálna práca, psychológia, pedagogika, sociálna politika, zdravotníctvo, ošetrovateľstvo, 7, <http://www.prohuman.sk/psychologia/application-transactional-analysis-marketing>, accessed 08 07 2015]. However, contrary to PR this effort is evident in the eyes of recipients in case of political marketing, while its most common tool is political advertising. On the contrary, politicians and political parties use PR to obtain favour of their electors in such a way that the electors have no idea that discourses provided to them are outputs of certain political promotion, in the spirit of the idea: “*The best PR is PR that cannot be tracked*” [4]. To achieve that discourse does not look like promotion, it is necessary to create such discourse which uses the form and language means similar to ‘natural’ communication. It means that if political representatives present their activities and focus in media, they adapt themselves to mass media communication. And exactly in case of tabloid media, adaptation of political communication to their requirements is beside other things manifested by emotionalization of expressions, which is primarily typical for them not only by referring to factors of presented phenomena and events evoked by emotions, but also by using emotionally rich means of language. According to Chlebcová Hečková this emotionalization is transferred to the politics itself, and so, among other things “... *it prevents politics to manifest itself in its real being, in its own logic*” [3]. It means that in this case it is the second determination - influence of political communication by mass media; it means that from the language perspective - the impact of (tabloid) media on simplification of language of the political communication, and also language by which the political communication is presented in society.

### **3. Deformation of language of journalism and politainment in tabloid media**

When we are dealing with a question of (un)reasonability of simplification of language used in presentation of political issues in media, it is necessary to distinguish which language issue is analysed. It is very important do distinguish a difference between the terms: a language, a language of media, a language of journalism and a language of tabloid media. The language is an important tool of communication for human. It is “*a complex system of units based on mutual relations*” [5]. It depends on the particular communicative situations how to use the language. Specific language tools are chosen in literary criticism of social and individual living conditions as such M. Antošová describes it in her article ‘Slovak Dominik Tatarka Writer in the World of Philosophical/Existentialism Inspiration’ [6]. By contrast, the different language is used for example in the religious symbolism which is explained by R. Králik in the study ‘Key Philosophical-Theological Concepts of Søren Kierkegaard in the Work of Paul Tillich’ [7]. Another type of language is used in philosophical and literary works

(about this tools writes for example M. Pavlíková in article ‘Despair and Alienation of Modern Man in Society’) and also another type of language is used in media [8]. The language of media is perceived as a language typical for mass media communication understood as a separate type of communication when compared with intra-personal, inter-personal, group and inter-cultural communication [9]. The language of media is a language used by all types of mass media in order to communicate with recipients. It means that it is a language used by press, radio, TV or Internet media [10]. Thus a collocation ‘language of media’ is used for general indication of language used in mass media.

The language of journalism is a more specific term which narrows the issue of language particularities of communication used in mass media to a particular professional group - journalists. The language of journalism can be considered as the professional language. It is used for mediation of journalistic communication which is a sub-group of mass media communication. Particularities of this language are adjusted to requirements of journalistic communication, the role of which, in opposite to mass media communication, is to bring current information in the form of homogenous content [11]. It means that the requirements on the language of journalism are closely connected with the requirements of journalistic profession. The language of journalism is influenced by a need of its written form (in electronic media - at least in preparatory phase of discourses’ creation), if the journalistic discourse should contain enough information and it should not be only entertaining. The language of journalism is also determined by a limited space in media and by genre differentiation of communication [12]. It is evident from the above mentioned that the language of journalism is considered to be serious language used in mass media, performing primarily its informative function which provides non-entertaining information about a specific topic. So it can be stated that certain seriousness is expected in terms of presenting the political issues by using the language of journalism.

The language of tabloid press is contrary to the language of journalism. Its particularities result from the characteristic of the tabloid press itself, the role of which is “*to entertain, mediate an event, bring originality, novelty, difference, visualization, simplicity and clarity*” according to Martina Kašiarová [13]. These features result from the very nature of the tabloid press. It is generally known that tabloid press was developed within the mass media as a commercial, cheap alternative of media addressing as many recipients as possible the number of which became a determining factor when defining a price of advertisement in periodic newspapers. To achieve attractiveness of discourses published in tabloid press for recipients, they must differ from the serious media not only by their content, but also by language. Therefore, language particularities of tabloid press have been gradually developed, such as application of expressive expressions, use of banal vocabulary, offensive lexis, sentences with diverse modality, etc. which give a motional charge to the discourses published in tabloid media, and by which the tabloid media tries to attract interest of

recipients in these discourses [L. Koubská, *Bulvarizace seriózních médií v České republice*, Lípa.cz, 25–27. 04. 2002, <http://www.lipa.cz/temata.htm>, 5, accessed 16.03.2011]. From this perspective the tabloid press can be considered as a tool which could help to educate the society, particularly in case of important, but not very interesting topics, which can also include the issue of politics. This fact is also pointed out by Czech media theoretician Karel Hvižd'ala according to whom one of five basic functions of the tabloid media is to inform people who usually do not read about the most important political issues, although it uses simplified form of presentation of this issue [K. Hvižd'ala, *Bulvár, to není nadávka*, Neviditelnypes.cz, 02.11.2007, [http://neviditelnypes.lidovky.cz/p\\_spolecnost.asp?r=p\\_spolecnost&c=A071031\\_205744\\_p\\_spolecnost\\_wag](http://neviditelnypes.lidovky.cz/p_spolecnost.asp?r=p_spolecnost&c=A071031_205744_p_spolecnost_wag), accessed 09.01.2011]. Therefore, simplification of language level used for presentation of political issues, and so also the language of politainment, can be considered as a positive phenomenon in this context. However, it cannot be applied to all areas of journalistic communication and also in this case there are certain borders which cannot be crossed when simplifying the language of tabloid press.

### ***3.1. Determinants of tabloid press language within the context of political news***

Despite the fact that the language of tabloid press is based on emotionality of a predication which is particularly achieved by using of a specific, sometimes even aggressive vocabulary, and on expressive modality of sentences, it is not possible to state that application of these elements is unlimited only because they are published in tabloid press discourses. A question of the extent of justness of these language elements in tabloid press discourses is on one side connected with their comparison with non-tabloid media, particularly in case of genre question, but also with an issue of requirements on mass media communication as such, both in terms of thematic and formal. Genre determinants result from a specification of genres that are used for presentation of political issues in press. Political topics in non-tabloid media periodic journals are expressed by news and also journalistic genres. It is expected from the non-tabloid news that it will provide brief, non-commented, not examined facts. Therefore, use of any emotional lexis is not acceptable [14]. Evaluation of the issue, and application of emotional tools are allowed in publicistic texts, however, their extent depends on specific applied genres. In case of a rational type of journalism, evaluation discourses that are based on rational argumentation are formed; on the other hand emotional type of journalism enables application of emotional means [14]. However, genre structure of tabloid press is much poorer compared to non-tabloid press. Journalism is present only minimally in this genre and most of discourses are formed by reporting genres. As far as emotionality of expression is a basic element of the tabloid press, it is evident that its application is connected with the tabloid press reporting, what represents unimaginable penetration in terms of a theory of non-tabloid genres. However, a new

perspective was formed within the Slovak theory of journalistic genres during the last years, which tries to differentiate tabloid journalism from the non-tabloid one and assign it certain particularities. According to the Slovak media expert Andrej Tušer, from the linguistic perspective it includes creation of undemanding texts, where it is not necessary for readers to concentrate in order to understand these texts. It means that in tabloid journalism the use of language means inducing emotions should be bound to the target to attract attention of a reader by the published issue; it means also by politics. In terms of rules of a text construction applied in Slovak language, the use of expressive means is specifically defined [15]. Dana Slančová defines it as a principle of expressivity within which different emotional and expressive means are used, not only from lexical level of the Slovak language, but also from morphological and syntactic. According to Slančová, a basic rule of their application in any type of discourse is a need to select specific elements very carefully, because “... *it is necessary to realize how their application would support our communication aim even despite the fact that it will evoke surprise or interest of a percipient despite his expectations; excessive expressivity and emotionality or even sentimentality can cause occurrence of communication barrier*” [16]. One of determinants of language simplification when informing about political issues in the tabloid press should be the fact that certain emotional and expressive elements create shocking, unusual text, but this text does not have to be understandable for recipients and due to it their interest in similar discourses decreases.

It is also possible to see another limit for decreasing of the level of language presentation of political topics in media - namely the social limit. Regardless of characteristic features of the tabloid press within mass media communication, it is still necessary to take into consideration the social role of mass media, or their social responsibility. As far as the society is governed by the politics, interest in politics and its operation should be supported by media. Politics is one of the basic systems of a society (in addition to technology, economy and culture), “...*he (a citizen, a member of the society - note of V.V.) often realizes their real importance only when their operation does not ensure the citizen gained standards any more...*” [17]. Due to this fact it is necessary to ensure that media will create discourses on political topics which will attract attention and interest of the most diverse number of recipients thanks to the way of their processing. To achieve this goal it is necessary to use relevant language means by using of which the discourse will fulfil the required target. However, from this perspective it is not possible to see success in tabloid media. Slovak sociologist Zuzana Kusá states that interest, particularly of young people, in politics is low, what is mainly caused by the way of presentation of politics in media [L. Sabo, *Sociologička: „Záujem mladých ľudí o politiku klesá“*, Korzar.sme.sk, 09.08.2005, <http://korzar.sme.sk/c/4524228/sociologicka-zaujem-mladych-ludi-o-politiku-klesa.html>, accessed 17.07.2015]. For example, from a research of relationship of attention of recipients and their behaviour in election to the National Council of the Slovak Republic in 2010 it was evident that if presentation of politics in media does not attract attention of a recipient

within a pre-election campaign. It means that if the recipient does not monitor the campaign, the recipient will not take part in election, so it means that the recipient does not participate on government of the Slovak Republic [18]. Apart from this fact, according to Kusá the way of presentation of politics in media produces impression upon young people that politics can be influenced only by election, while the participation of citizens of Slovakia on election often reaches barely half of eligible voters [<http://korzar.sme.sk/c/4524228/sociologicka-zaujeme-mladych-ludi-o-politiku-klesa.html>]. It is evident from the above mentioned that the way of presentation of politics in tabloid press, and so the language used for presentation of this issue, is determined by certain limits given by society. This limits must be reflected by tabloid mass media and apply its knowledge to the way and extent of simplification of language in discourses. On the basis of previous information stipulated herein it is possible to state that despite the fact that the Slovak tabloid press could increase interest of Slovak citizens in politics by language means selected in interesting way, the tabloid press is not successful. A reason can be also the fact that expressive and emotional language means used in the tabloid press discourses focused on presentation of political topics, as well as simplification of language are used beyond the scope of their legitimacy and thus they become counterproductive.

#### **4. Conclusions**

A criticism of simplification of language used for presentation of political topics is often incorrectly based on inaccurate understanding of the terms - language of journalism, language of media and language of tabloid press, which are not often identified as separate forms of language in media, but they are presented only as synonyms. Similarly, the thematic and situation application of an issue of language deformation is not taken into account in case of mass media communication of information linked to a political issue. Regarding the political themes and serious themes, it is expected from media that they will inform about these issues seriously. However, not all media concentrate on seriousness. Tabloid media differentiate from the non-tabloid particularly by their orientation on entertainment reporting of information to respondents, and therefore they are no considered to be serious. They have their so called ‘-tainment’ particularities that are formed not only in terms of topics they deal with, but also in terms of their presentation. Therefore, typical reporting discourses for them are infotainment and specific discourses focused on presentation of political issue in the form of a politainment. As we have presented in our paper, entertainment in a specific political discourses of tabloid media is not achieved only by selection of communication information and topics, but also by language which is specific for the tabloid media. Despite the fact that media experts do not consider the respective language to be appropriate for presentation of such serious theme as politics, it attracts attention of a large number of recipients who obtain at least some information from politics although with a questionable degree of

relevancy, who, according to Karol Hvižd'ala, as mentioned several times herein, probably would never be interested in politics.

It is clear from our paper that as far as the language is a particularity of tabloid press, it cannot be considered as a language of journalism, and so it is not possible to state that when presenting political themes in the tabloid media the language is a simplified language of journalism. In this case the language of tabloid press is used as a separate type of combination of language means used for communication of tabloid media with respondents. In our paper we did not try to defend simplification of language when presenting political themes in media. Our aim was to point out that there are certain facts within the theory of journalism and language requirements on mass media and journalistic communication which in certain context substantives this phenomena. At the same time, by using an example of election to the National Council of the Slovak Republic in 2010 we pointed out that the desired effectiveness of using the simplified language when informing recipients about political situation to achieve involvement of recipients (at least in the form of increased participation on election) is not evidently reflected.

Despite the fact that we indicated certain directly proportional dependency of participation on elections with the fact how clearly understandable language for the widest possible range of recipients is used in the tabloid press, we think that our hypothesis can be a suitable assumption for modification of separate means of language of the tabloid press in such a way that it fulfils the above mentioned function connected with increased interest of the widest public in political situation. Of course, this phenomenon is applicable only in case that the tabloid press journals should be (and want to be) holders of certain social functions, and not only commercial products ensuring profit to their publishers. If the language of tabloid press can be formed into such extent that use of expressive and emotional means will cause that the recipients, who do not read or who do not understand articles about political issues presented in non-tabloid press, will become interested in simply presented information from the area of politics and political situation in their country, what, in case of Slovakia, was reflected in increased participation on election, simplification of language within mass media communication (but only in tabloid mass media) could be considered as justified. However, if the facts defined by us (language of the tabloid press) start to be applied out of their natural media (tabloid), the extent of their justification significantly decreases and so it is good to think about rightfulness of journalistic language simplification when presenting political themes. But this question is closely connected with the issue of tabloid and penetration of politainment into serious media.

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