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**ПРАГМАТИЧЕСКИЙ ПОТЕНЦИАЛ ПРЕЦЕДЕНТНЫХ
ТЕКСТОВ В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ ГАЗЕТЕ**

В статье представлены прецедентные тексты, используемые в аналитических материалах публицистического стиля, наиболее популярные сферы-источники их заимствования, а также приводится анализ, производимого ими прагматического эффекта, что представляет интерес для широкого круга читателей.

Ключевые слова и выражения: прецеденты, прецедентные тексты, сферы-источники, реалии, эвфемизмы, прагматический потенциал, целевая аудитория.

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**THE PRAGMATIC POTENTIAL OF THE PRECEDENT
TEXTS IN THE MODERN PRESS**

The article presents precedent texts used in the analytical publicistic articles, the most popular spheres of their borrowings and some efforts are made to analyze the pragmatic effect produced, which can be of interest and of value for a wide readership.

Key words and expressions: precedents, precedent text, spheres of origin, realias, euphemisms, pragmatic potential, target audience.

Introduction

Nowadays, the thesis that the cultural component has become an integral part of communicative competence doesn't require any proof. The statement seems to be an axiom. Thus, the knowledge of the verbal code and its usage rules can be insufficient for complete understanding of this or that utterance. The same is true for the publicistic texts. Studying the phenomenon of the precedents is a topical linguistic matter as the modern publicistic materials are abundant in precedent units which present a difficulty for understanding and translation as well as stir the examining person's interest in terms of pragmatic-linguistic analysis [4]. In order to provide the reader with ample understanding of the phenomenon, we suggest reviewing its definitions and dissect publicistic materials where these units foreground. We also aim at grading them in accordance with their sphere of origin and the frequency of their usage.

Theoretical background

A precedent can be defined as a stereotyped, figurative and associative complex that is meaningful for a certain group of people and regularly used in the speech of that group of people [1, p.105]. Precedents are used to point out a certain object (real or imaginary) with their 'signified' being a minimised nationally-determined idea of the said object [3, p. 1]. They tend to be subdivided into: 1) verses; 2) quotes from literary works in prose; 3) extracts from a famous song lyric; 4) titles of fiction works; 5) film titles; 6) proverbs, sayings, winged phrases; 7) the Holy Writ's periphrasis; 8) political quotes [2, p.155].

Statistically, the most popular sphere of origin for the precedents in the modern press is proved to be the political sphere. Among the precedent units within that group are politicians' quotes that gained popularity, political mottos, parliamentary euphemisms, socio-political clichés and realias.

Results and discussion

Let's review some examples. A USA Today article dated back

to 2004 is notable for its headline comprising a quote from John Kerry (*the incumbent Secretary of State and a 2004 Democratic presidential candidate, who competed with George W Bush*) debate speech – “*The Right Man in the Right Place at the Right Time*” that the journalist modified to suit his needs. Conjuring «*the wrong war in the wrong place at the wrong time*» in order to criticize the Bush administration for the war in Iraq, the journalist creates an expressive, eye-catching headline thanks to “protuberance” of the precedent text and the inner gradation effect of the original phrase. All the above mentioned means seem a sure way to attract the readers’ attention to the burdensome problem of the military expenditures for the country’s economy [USA Today, № 11, 2004].

The article “Floor, sweat” (*there’s a play upon words – in Russian, it phonetically resembles the name of the Cambodian dictator Pol Pot*) [5, №77] dwells upon the arduous working conditions that the rural Spanish sanitary workers and cleaners have to endure to make their living. The headline ignites a wide range of negative emotions connected with Pol Pot’s shocking criminal activities which led to over 2 million victims among the Cambodian population. As a result, the article’s author sets serious mood and makes the readership sympathize with the cleaners’ sufferings. Here we can also see the usage of similar emotions to influence the readership the right way.

The next article under analysis is headlined “The superiority of the white route” (*there’s a play upon words – in Russian, the words ‘route’ and ‘race’ differ in pronunciation only in one letter*) [5, №86], and furnishes an account of a journey through a number of Northern states made by the journalist. By inserting a motto of Ku-Klux-Klan, an extremist nationalist organization that preaches the white supremacy, the author gives us an idea that the white population was predominant in the states and regions that he had visited, but we should understand that the supremacy mentioned here is *numerical* and the negative connotations of the

precedent text only serve to attract attention of the readership.

Speaking about political clichés, a photo article “Cowboys of local significance” [5, №69], where the author shares with Texas cowboys’ snapshots, is worthy of note. Here we can notice a modified socio-political cliché ‘*matters/conflicts of local significance*’ used to create a striking headline and emphasize their inconsiderable number.

The next article which goes under the headline “The change of the Motherland” (*pun in the headline – in Russian two phrases are intermixed ‘change of the Motherland’ and ‘high treason’*)[Russian Reporter, №16-17 (294-295), 2013], sheds light upon the histories of those citizens of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea who were lucky to flee to South Korea due to a flare-up between the two countries whose peoples were always close. The article’s heading comprises a legal term, which coincides in meaning with the term ‘high treason’ and by masterfully inserting it to instruct the reader on the article’s content, the journalist connects the citizens’ actions with their consequences as an unauthorized escape beyond the country’s frontier is considered nothing but a high treason.

The article “China’s future: Xi Jinping and the Chinese dream” [The Economist, May the 7th, 2013] contains a modified precedent ‘*the American Dream*’ – a collective set of the traditional American ideals: equality, democracy, prosperity and equal opportunities for everyone. The precedent dates back to the Declaration of Independence (1776), that’s the reason why we put the example into the sphere of political life. By implementing such a precedent text into the heading, the author expresses hope that the new leader of the People’s Republic of China will pursue the policy launched by his predecessors and ensure the prosperity and economic growth of the Celestial Empire.

The second most popular precedents’ sphere of origin is the cinematographic one. Film titles and quotes are widely used by the journalists as the sphere of cinema is closer to popular culture

than the political one, they are more recognizable and possibility of the communicative minus-effect is quite low.

The article “Coordinate this” [6, №11 (136)], describing the election process of the Opposition Coordinative Council, alludes to the popular comedy ‘Analyze This’ (1999) making us realize the fact that while we feel indignant because of a large number of Jews, Stalinists, Liberals and nationalists in the ballots, nobody seems to notice that all the candidates are Moscovites which makes the whole opposition movement a sort of a “crony club”.

Let’s have a closer look at another USA Today article that mentions John Kerry in the following headline “*John Kerry, Harry Houdini or Just Plain Houdini Economics?*” [USA Today, №74, 2004]. The heading is remarkable for a precedent alluding to a prominent escape-artist (illusionist) of the beginning of the 20-th century. Harry Houdini attained international fame by performing tricks during which he broke free from chains, handcuffs, cages, strait jackets, air-tight chambers, sacs sometimes being tied or shackled. Obviously, the precedent contains the presidential candidate criticism, so the author wonders whether Mr. Kerry is going to run from the economy-connected issues or all kind of issues. The precedent text is used to create a vivid contrast in order to mock the candidate himself and his subterfuge used to avoid sensitive questions.

One more example was noticed in an issue of the GQ magazine (Russian edition). The article “*The empire strikes back with a law*” [6, №12 (137)] enlightens us on the reaction of Russian law makers that followed the adaptation of the Magnitsky List – a list of officials who violated human rights and therefore unable to enter the US territory. Judging by the fact that the journalist utilizes a modified title of one of the Star Wars saga parts, we can suggest that his attitude towards such law-making initiatives is quite skeptical.

Now we suggest we pass to the sphere of folklore which also proved to be quite fruitful source for precedents in modern press.

Such a photo spread as “*Throw dust in the eyes*” [5, №79] provides us with an insight of a vacuum cleaners’ collectors meeting, the author here uses the idioms direct meaning as showing off is common for the events of the kind and the figurative meaning in order to inform us on the articles content. The outcome of such a linguistic experiment is a vivid article’s heading.

The article “*The very long arm of the law*” [The Guardian, August 25, 2004] dwells on the arrest of a Russian media tycoon Vladimir Gusinsky in Spain under the suspicion of embezzlement. The author expanded the idiom ‘the long arm of law’ to demonstrate his attitude towards the fact that the justice was served regardless of the distance and add a pinch of irony.

Conclusion

It’s necessary to say that the precedents borrowed from the spheres of literature, sport, science, theatre and some others exist but they are not considerable in number.

In conclusion, we would like to draw a line and summarize the inferences that we worked out during our research. As for the precedents, they possess rich pragmatic potential and can serve for different purposes, the most frequent are to create an eye-catching headlines, to attract attention to the material, to tune in the reader with the tone of narration, would it be serious or downright sceptical, to appeal to a certain range of emotions or to incentivize the reader to do something which is widely used in corporate image advertising.

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