

Does inflection have the power to breach the information quality of news reporting?

Media organizations operate in the public space and hence they have the ability to impinge on public opinion. That is why the society demands socially responsible behavior from the media. The flagship of media activities is the production of news reporting. This is presented as a reflection of current reality and as such attributed such positive values as being truthful, objective, and balanced. The media organizations claim that messages perform a strictly informative function and its purpose is merely to harmonize the information possessed by the recipient and the sender. In this paper I argue that the identity of the key factors of media communication, i.e. its purpose (to inform), its form (language) and its meaning (relation to reality), may be thrown off its balance by language means. In particular, this paper looks at inflection and at its potential to serve as a tool to violate the rules of news reporting information quality.

As the underlying theories I use the normative theory of mass media, namely the information quality concept, and the functionally oriented stylistics. The main methodological prerequisite is the compatibility of the information quality concept with the linguistic view of informative function and with the theory of stylistic markedness. To answer the research question an analytical tool for data analysis has been constructed, namely on the basis of stylistically predetermined marked language means on a morphological level. The research sample consists of sixty news programs, thirty of them selected from the TV news broadcasted by public-service television and thirty from a commercial channel. The thirty days of broadcasting were selected randomly. The basic observed unit for the analysis was a television report, i.e. a communication unit forming a closed thematic/content whole. I surveyed absolute and relative frequencies and occurrences of observed inflectional means in the given sample.

The conference presentation will briefly outline the process of data analysis and bring out the findings. It will be shown that via morphological means, e.g. structures with semantic dative, endings of nouns with depreciative connotations, overusing of diminutives, deagentive constructions, plural forms of verbs, etc., the evaluation of news or preconceived emotional attitude towards them can be foisted upon the recipient. To put it to a broader context the survey shows that despite the fact that the means of inflection represent a less overt strategy than lexical units or intonation they may show an implicit, but strong potential to implement into the news reporting a function other than the informative one.

Key words

news reporting, information quality, functional stylistics, markedness, morphology, inflection

Literature

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