Presenting conflict situations in the media discourse: verbal and non-verbal strategies

N.I. Lyutyanska*

Petro Mohyla Black Sea State University, Mykolayiv, Ukraine
*Corresponding author. E-mail: natalka.lyutyanska@gmail.com

Abstract: The present paper deals with the notion of conflict situation as well as its presentation in the media discourse. The study is based mainly on the Internet media in multicultural countries, i.e. Great Britain and the United States of America. The present research is conducted in the framework of critical discourse analysis. The latter sees the text as a basic unit of communication. In our case the communication takes place between representatives of different ethnic, racial or religious groups.

Keywords: conflict situation, interethnic interaction, media discourse, speech strategies, pragmatic effect

Introduction

Communication is an essential part of human experience. The process of communication in the modern globalized world takes place between representatives of different cultures. Consequently, different outcomes are possible. They are reproduced via different means and media discourse is one of them.

Media discourse itself gains importance in the globalized world where information is rapidly spread through different channels. It is a leading means of describing different events in the life of multicultural societies. Thus, media discourse spreads information about conflict situations. The latter form the basis for the current research.

Many researches have investigated the nature of conflicts in different perspectives, i.e. sociological, psychological and political ones [see, for instance, 3; 4; 6]. Conflicts are of great interest in communication studies as well [2; 7]. The above mentioned researches are devoted to main reasons of conflicts and their effect on parties. However, little is known about ways and means for presenting conflict situations in different kinds of discourse, media in particular. Actualized contradiction of values, expectations and purposes of speech situation participants is defined as a conflict [11, p. 114]. It should be mentioned that one of the communication participants deliberately or unconsciously makes damages to another one. And at the same time the latter takes appropriate measures or steps to oppose [12].

Some certain problem, real or imaginary, could be the point for interpersonal conflict. The problem of power or the problem of superiority should be enumerated here. Specific element of material world or social reality could be the object of the conflict. Moreover, the above mentioned element can be the cross point of personal or group interests of different individuals going to control it [10, p. 13].

Situations of conflict can occur when participants of the speech process belong to different ethnic groups. Thus, we can distinguish interethnic conflicts. The causes for interethnic conflicts depend on different factors. Presence of historical memories of interethnic grievances, institutional factors that promote ethnic intolerance are among them [1, p. 2-3]. Moreover, manipulation of historical memories in order to invoke emotions such as fear, resentment and hate form the basis for conflict situations.

The goal of the current research was to investigate the means used in the media to present interethnic conflicts.

Methods and corpus

A series of articles from British and American Internet media serve as a data for this study. It should be mentioned that qualitative newspapers as well as tabloids were taken into account. Information given in the articles represents several sections, mainly politics, society, education.

The critical discourse analysis or CDA was used as a main method while carrying out this research. The above mentioned term is used to denote the critical linguistic approach of scholars finding the larger discursive unit of text to be the basic unit of communication [8, p. 6]

Results and discussion

The findings of this research show that each interethnic conflict described in media discourse has its own characteristics. Authors of the articles use a variety of strategies to report situations for the readers in order to have some certain pragmatic effect. In this paper verbal and non-verbal strategies in presenting conflict situations are distinguished. Verbal strategies reflect language specifics of the newspaper articles whereas non-verbal strategies perform auxiliary function in reporting news from life of multicultural society.

Verbal means in presenting conflict situations are mostly represented by speech strategies. The latter include identification strategy since both participants of communication process are involved in conflict situation. This type of speech strategies shows the affiliation of the participants with the certain ethnic group. This strategy is realized due to identifying nationality of the participants. In some cases it is realized by showing their race or religion, both with the help of ethnonyms [13, p. 74].

Table 1. Verbal means in presenting conflict situations: speech strategies

Type of speech strategy	Example
Identification strategy (nationality)	Two heavily armed, camouflaged **Mexican soldiers** crossed 50 yards inside Arizona in January and drew their guns against **U.S. Border Patrol agents** who confronted them in a tense standoff [15].
Identification strategy (religion)	A married couple claim they were victimised at work due to **their religious beliefs** after being refused holidays during **the Muslim holy month of Ramadan** [16].
Identification strategy (race)	**An African American San Diego police officer** is suing the Police Department, alleging that he suffered harassment and job retaliation after **complaining about the use of a racist cartoon during a training session**. **Sgt. Arthur Scott, 43, a 10-year veteran of the department, complained about the cartoon, which depicted Frank McCarter, the department's first black officer, as "apelike".** [17].

Table 2. Verbal means in presenting conflict situations: expressive means, stylistic devices and special vocabularies

Verbal means	Examples
Expressive means: alliteration	U.S. officials said it was one of nearly two dozen border incursions by Mexican soldiers into southern Arizona in the last four years [15].
Expressive means: words with emotional meaning	A married couple claim they were **victimised** at work… [16]. Donna Tunkara, 32, and husband Yassin, 31, say they suffered **discrimination**, **harassment**, **victimisation** and **constructive dismissal** after bosses at the Portrack Lane warehouse in Stockton-on-Tees of supermarket giant Morrisons turned down holiday requests in 2012 [16]. A tribunal held at Teesside Magistrates' Court yesterday heard evidence from Mrs. Tunkara, who says her holiday request for the last 10 days of fasting during Ramadan was turned down **unfairly** [16].
Stylistic devices: epithets	… the 35-minute confrontation underscored the **continuing** friction between the U.S. and Mexico when it comes to policing the often **chaotic and violent** Southwest border… [15].
Stylistic devices: simile	He said: 'You have not got exactly what you wanted and **acted like a spoiled brat**… [16].
Special vocabularies: terms	Border incursion, border patrol, military uniform, the Mexican Embassy, a spokesman for President, International Boundary Fence Line, cartel; Tribunal, solicitor, cross examination, accusations, fabricate, holiday request, case, staff, shifts, breaks; Police department, sue, job retaliation, complain, officer, training session

The texts of media discourse are aimed at influencing the reader and appealing his/her emotions. This is achieved not only by using special technics, i.e. binding words, but also by variety of expressive means and stylistic devices [14, p. 66-67].

It should be mentioned that non-verbal strategies are also important in presenting conflict situations in media discourse. They embrace pictures or photos and graphs. The latter are used to support speech structures reporting conflict situations. The primary function of pictures or photos is to depict main protagonists of the news stories. Moreover, they represent them either in the moment of the conflict itself or after it. Graphs are used to support data given in the news stories.

Finally, structural parts of the article i.e. headline and main text itself should be also considered while analyzing conflict situations and their verbalization in media discourse. Information arrangement in the Internet media can have some pragmatic effect. The font and its size, the style of the text help convey the main content of the article. They enable readers to discern which topics or events are the most important or relevant in the particular case. Furthermore, each news item has links to social media networks (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) for readers to response. Thus, the Internet media give the opportunity to leave feedback for authors of the articles and their readers, developing the process of communication.

The present study is helpful for the further investigations of conflict situations verbalization in the media discourse.

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