

# Analysis of Audiovisual Texts of Public Service Announcements: Approaches and Methodology

Evgeniya Malenova<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Dostoevsky Omsk State University, 644077 Prospekt Mira, 55-A, Omsk, Russia

**Abstract.** This research describes the approaches and methodology of analysis of public service announcements (PSAs) created in the audiovisual (AV) format. Recently, PSAs have become an important tool used to adjust current social behaviour models and to bring forward the maladies of the modern society. To increase PSAs' persuasive potential, their authors use different creative forms and solutions. This research analyses different ways to understand the essence of AV texts, suggests the methodology of AV PSAs' analysis and presents the results of an experimental verification of the methodology described. The methodology of the analysis provided may be used to analyse other types of AV texts, including TV-commercials, creative AV productions, documentaries, etc. It can also be applied in the frameworks of the AV translation process. The main results of the research are presented as an analysis algorithm consisting of several consecutive steps that may help to understand the PSA author's original intention, its persuasive potential, and to predict the recipients' reaction.

## 1 Introduction

Public service announcements (PSAs) have gradually become an integral part of our lives. We can see these messages, aimed to improving social behaviour patterns and to attracting the public's attention to certain maladies of the society, practically everywhere. The creative potential of PSAs' authors seems limitless; they use different means of manipulation and versatile forms of presenting their messages to create a negative attitude towards the scourge of family violence, bad habits, environmental issues, etc. In their pursuit of PSAs' effectiveness, the advertisers are using a wide array of tools and formats to convey their ideas to the public. One of these tools is an audiovisual PSA (AV PSA). □

The concept of audiovisual (AV) texts differs from the conventional understanding of the thing what a text is due to their multimodal nature. Dealing with AV texts, we cannot focus on language entirely, but rather have to take into consideration extralinguistic channels used to convey the key message of the text in question. Such approach "offers a global, holistic, and plurisemiotic perspective on communication" [1], and allows us to understand, how the unanimity of linguistic and extralinguistic channels adds to PSA's persuasive, artistic, and communicative effectiveness.

## 2 The multimodal approach in audiovisual texts' analysis

Talking about different approaches to AV PSAs analysis, it is necessary to point out that terminological apparatus and understanding of AV texts as polysemiotic entities differ in Russian and European linguistic traditions. The following section will be devoted to a brief review of research in the field and approaches used by Russian and foreign scholars.

### 2.1 Russian tradition of analysing audiovisual texts

It is important to point out that for quite a long time Soviet and Russian Linguistics used a text-centric approach towards the research of any type of text. It means that the scholars tended to analyse only one channel of communication – a verbal one. Although due to the brisk development of multimodal communication means, evolution of computers, TV, and different media platforms used to present the recipients with different types of information, the text-centric approach gave its way to a communicative one; thus the researchers admitted that there are other channels and tools used to convey a message and influence the recipients' consciousness. □

The linguists moved on to the concept of creolized texts consisting of two non-homogenous parts: verbal and non-verbal [2]. Different scholars used different terms to nominate these syncretic textual entities composed from elements of different semiotic nature; they called them "polycode texts" [3], "videoverbal texts" [4], "contaminated texts" [5], "intersemiotic texts" [6], etc. The present research does not aim at criticising

\* Corresponding author: [malenovae@mail.ru](mailto:malenovae@mail.ru)

the terms mentioned; although for the purpose of the study, the term “audiovisual text” will be used, because it reflects the very essence of the texts in question, including both visual and audial components which, being blended together, create a homogenous entity constructed of different non-homogeneous parts.

Such contradictory nature of these texts poses a certain challenge to the process of their analysis. These complex structures can be analysed from the point of view of their structural and functional peculiarities, for example, Anisimova (2003) points out some structural element of these texts (image, colour, font, captions) and analyses their functions [7]. On the other hand, Sonin (2005) uses a synergetic approach arguing that all elements of multimodal entities should be analysed as an entity, because “the [synergetic] effect depends both on organization of the elements inside the polycode texts, and on an ability to supplement this intramodal connection of each of the elements with an intermodal connection, because without this connection it is impossible to construct a unified mental representation of the text and provide its further effective implementation” [8]. This integral synergetic approach can be especially useful in the case of PSA texts analysis because their effectiveness directly depends on the connection mentioned.

## 2.2 Multimodal analysis in foreign research

Foreign approach to AV texts started from a different point – the semiotic paradigm. In its frameworks, multimodality is seen as “the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event” [9]. This approach served as a base for an innovative form of multimodal texts’ analysis called “multimodal transcription” and introduced by Baldry and Thibault (2006). The multimodal text is broken down into frames each placed into a separate cell of a table; then each frame is described according to three parameters included into the correspondent columns (visual image, kinetic action/movement, soundtrack) [10]. Such a way to analyze AV text allows us to understand its complex semiotic nature and to see how different semiotic modes are used to create meaning.

On the other hand, some foreign scholars [11] follow the logico-semantic approach, according to which the texts and images relate to one another and lose any meaning if dealt with separately. As Barthes (1977) argues AV is a semantic entity of verbal and audial codes “where dialogue functions not simply as elucidation but really does advance the action by setting out, in the sequence of messages, meanings that are not to be found in the image itself” [12].

The present research will follow an integral polysemiotic approach used by Gambier (2013) and deal with different semiotic codes, articulated by the director and the editor of AV text and comprehended (in some way) by the recipients. These semiotic codes cannot be analyzed separately; they constitute a coherent entity each adding to some degree to AV production message. Gambier defines 14 semiotic codes that are active in the

production of a certain meaning [13]. He defines two sign systems (verbal and non-verbal) and two channels (audial and visual). Verbal elements of the audial channel include three codes: linguistic, paralinguistic (verbal), and literary and theatrical; verbal elements of the audial channel include only one, graphic code. Audio non-verbal signs are transmitted via sound arrangement, musical, and non-verbal paralinguistic codes. The most numerous kind of codes is constructed of non-verbal elements transmitted via a visual channel including iconographic, photographic, scenographic, film, kinesic, proxemics, and dress codes. Such detailed classification of codes used to produce the meaning of an AV text was used as a base for the analysis in the present research.

## 3 Materials and method

The main hypothesis of the research was that the integral polysemiotic approach might be used effectively to analyse AV PSAs and to define their effectiveness and persuasive potential. The experimental study performed aimed at proving the fact that the idea of analysing the perception of different semiotic codes involved into creation of AV text may become a viable tool to analyse AV PSAs and to create a universal algorithm for AV texts’ analysis.

The material for the present research was an AV PSA produced by Andrey Dmitriev and directed by Artur Fechishev called “Hi, mom”. This PSA is created in the form of a video clip of Rodnopolisy band dealing the topic of child-parent relationships. The video begins with a sequence of scenes, where different men – a businessman, a statesman, a prisoner, etc. are talking to their mothers on the phone in a rap style. In a chorus the soloist is singing about his gratitude to his mother for all the time, tears, and efforts she invested in bringing up a son. This PSA includes some powerful images of toys flowing around a mobile phone with the word “MOTHER” written in an address book, a gambling addict telling lies to his mother and asking for some money to spend on his treatment, a man calling his deceased mother to tell some news but understanding that he has no one to talk. All the tools possible are used in the PSA in question to create an appealing message that may form a respect to motherhood and adjust people’s value orientations and priorities connected with family values. To understand which codes and channels affect the recipients in a greater degree a questionnaire was compiled. The respondents were asked to watch the video and indicate the main topic of the PSA, range different codes (based on Gambier’s classification) according to their persuasive potential, and answer a few questions concerning their emotional response towards the different elements of this PSA.

The survey was conducted via the Internet; 25 respondents took part in the survey. Gender, age, and social status of the respondents deemed irrelevant, though according to the statistics, most of the respondents were young people aged 18–35. They all fall within the target audience of this PSA, so the results may be considered valid. All the answers were thoroughly

analysed with the purpose to understand, which semiotic codes were the most relevant for the recipients. The algorithm of AV PSAs' analysis was based upon the results of the survey evaluation.

#### 4 Results and discussion

This first question of the survey "What was the PSA about" was of a diagnostic nature, because if the message of PSA were unclear, it would be hard to assess the survey results. As the results show, all the recipients were able to grip the main idea of the PSA in question. Though their answers differed a little bit (e.g. "Love and value your parents", "Keep in touch with your parents", "Don't forget your parents", "Call your mother"), all recipients understood the key message.

All other questions of the survey were connected with different semiotic codes that produced meaning, as well as with their correlation and perception. The recipients were asked to range all semiotic codes they encountered in the AV PSA that they had watched (only once) according to their semantic, persuasive, and emotional potential. This allowed us to understand, which semiotic codes predominate and influence the consciousness of the recipient, when he or she is watching an AV production. Each code was evaluated according to five parameters: "impressed very much", "impressed", "did not impress much", "left untouched", and "did not notice this code at all". Each parameter then was assigned a value ranging from 4 ("impressed very much") to 1 ("left untouched"). If the person did not manage to range the semiotic code, it was assigned a value of 0. After that the values were summed up to define which codes influenced the respondents most of all. The results of these calculations are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The most predominant semiotic codes of AV PSA according to the survey

Semiotic code	Value
(Verbal element/Audio channel)	48
linguistic	38
paralinguistic (verbal)	49
literary and theatre	
(Non-verbal element/Audio channel)	35
sound arrangement	36
musical	40
paralinguistic (non-verbal)	
(Verbal element/Video channel)	29
graphic	
(Non-verbal element/Video channel)	32
iconographic	38
photographic	39
scenographic	33
film	38
kinesic	42
proxemics	42
dress	

The results obtained show that the most powerful source in terms of influencing the recipient was the group of semiotic codes connected with verbal elements transmitted through an audial channel. These codes include linguistic (dialogues, monologues, comments, etc.), verbal paralinguistic (delivery, intonation, accents), and literary and theatre (plot, narrative, drama, rhythm) codes, the last code being the champion in terms of persuasive effect. This means that verbal codes reinforced by their audial form are the key elements of an AV text, creating and conveying the bulk of the text's meaning.

Non-verbal semantic codes transmitted through a video channel ranked the second in terms of influencing the recipients' perception. This group included iconographic (pictures, icons, emoticons, etc.), photographic (lighting, perspective, colours), scenographic (visual environment), film (shooting, framing, cutting, etc.), kinesic (gestures, postures, facial expressions), proxemic (movements, use of space), and dress (costumes, make up, etc.) codes. Especially two last semiotic codes attracted a lot of attention of the respondents and were called the most effective in terms of transmitting the PSA's message.

Musical and sound arrangement codes did not much influence some recipients, though the PSA was created in the form of a musical video. Some of the recipients even pointed out that the music was even irritating and did not let them concentrate on other semiotic codes. This remark is very important because it means that musical code triggered some emotional reactions (only one respondent stated that he or she did not pay attention to this code at all). 42% of the respondents said that musical code blended with other codes quite effectively and allowed to create the necessary emotional background.

Graphic elements of the PSA did not provoke much of a reaction, though there were a lot of captions and signs adding to the whole meaning of this PSA. This is the point where additional research effort is needed to understand the nature of this phenomenon.

Most of the respondents (69%) shared the opinion that the seamless nature of all semiotic codes used was a key to the PSA's success. According to their reactions, all of respondents were able to see this link and feel engaged. In their comments, the respondents noted that they felt sad, embarrassed, and emotionally immersed in the PSA's narrative. Some of them felt an urge to call their parents, which means the PSA has reached its goal.

#### 5 Conclusion

In the conclusion, I can argue that an integral polysemiotic approach proved to be effective in terms of analyzing AV PSA. The experimental stage of the research allowed us to define some steps of AV PSA analysis that may help the researchers to evaluate PSA's persuasive potential and predict the recipients' reaction.

Step 1. Defining whether all recipients agree on the key message of the AV PSA.

Step 2. Analysing linguistic, verbal paralinguistic, and literary and theatre semantic codes with tight connection to non-verbal audio and video codes as the most powerful tools of creating PSA's meaning and influencing the recipient's emotional and axiological backgrounds.

Step 3. Analysing non-verbal video codes, especially proxemics and dress codes, as well as photographic scenographic, and film semantic codes in connection with language the characters of PSA use and soundtrack, because this correlation provokes a pronounced emotional and aesthetical reactions of the recipients.

Step 4. Analysing non-verbal paralinguistic, musical and sound arrangement semiotic codes, because often these codes prove to add an additional meaning to AV text becoming a source for controversial reactions of the recipients.

Step 5. Analysing graphic verbal codes; trying to understand why they are left unnoticed by the recipients. Probably, this is the point where the researcher has to go an extra mile and explore associations these codes trigger. There is no doubt that more research is needed to find a perfect algorithm for AV texts' analysis. Choice of other approaches, analysis of other types of AV material may cast more light on a problem of multimodal analysis and will become a solid base for further theoretical studies in the field.

The reported study was funded by RFBR and Government of Omsk region according to research project № 17-14- 55001.

## References

1. A. Bączkowska, *Linguistics Applied*, **4**, 49 (2012)
2. Yu. A. Sorokin, E.F. Tarasov, *Optimisation of speech communication* (Moscow, Nauka, 1990)
3. A. A. Bernatskaya, Verbal communication: the specialised scientific journal **3** (11), Krasnoyarsk (2000)
4. O.V. Poimanova, *Semanticheskoye prostranstvo videoverbalnogo teksta (Semantic space of videoverbal text)*, published dissertation abstract, Moscow (1997)
5. Yu. A. Belchikov, *Culture of Russian speech and effective communication* (Moscow, 1996)
6. E. V. Bochkarev, *Semantic dictionary* (DEKOM : Nizny Novgorod, 2003)
7. E. E. Anisimova, *Linguistics of the text and intercultural communication: a case study of creolised texts* (Moscow, Academia, 2003)
8. A. G. Sonin, *Modelling of the mechanism of policode texts' understanding*, Doctoral dissertation, (Moscow, 2005)
9. G. Kress, T. V. Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse: the Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication* (London, Edward Arnold, 2001)
10. Ch. J. Taylor, *Handbook of Translation Studies 4*, (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2013)
11. R. Martinec, A. Salway, *Visual Communication* **4** (3), 337 (2005)
12. R. Barthes, *Image, music, text* (Fontana Press, London, 1977)
13. Y. Gambier, The position of audiovisual translation studies. *The Routledge handbook of translation studies* (New York, Routledge, 2013)