INTERTEXTUALITY AND INFORMATIVITY OF PRESS RELEASES: FACTORS DETERMINING THE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PR PRACTITIONER AND JOURNALIST

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Abstract: Of the textual properties of press releases intertextuality and informativity significantly influence the communication between the PR practitioner and the journalist. The article defines the release intertextuality by highlighting its specific characteristics and suggests future research directions. The notion of informativity as it was defined by R. de Beaugrande and W. Dressler does not apply to releases and therefore, it is re-defined and its sources of expectations are identified. The article also proposes a model of analysis, which can be used for didactic or research purposes to identify the release informativity.

Keywords: press release, intertextuality, informativity, textual property source of expectation, model of analysis

1. Introduction

As a source of information for journalists, the press release is a common means of communication between PR practitioners and journalists. The news communicated by the release is undoubtedly important to the PR practitioner, but not always important to the journalist, who assesses its relevance to his public according to their criteria and expectations as well as to the editorial policy of the publication (Lazăr 2009: 13-15). Therefore, when writing a release, the practitioner is constrained by a number of requirements. Specifically, he has to:

- meet the media expectations determined by their strategy to inform and influence the public;
- offer relevant information to his direct public, the journalists, and the indirect ones, the mass-media public;
- facilitate the release processing.

The ultimate purpose of the PR practitioner with the release is to announce coming events or to disseminate information regarding a cause, but his immediate purpose is to have the release published by the mass-media. Even if the journalist's decision to use the release may be influenced by his relationship with the practitioner, his acceptance ultimately depends on two factors: a) the most important element of news value, i.e. the impact, and b) the textual properties of the release.

Situationality, coherence and cohesion are not to be disregarded, but what will definitely determine the acceptance of the relelase is its high informativity and appropriate intertextuality.

This article is intended to identify the specificity of intertextuality in the above-defined particular case of communication, which involves both knowledge of the release

and knowledge of the news story that is actualized in different stages of the communication process. The article will also define the release informativity and will identify and exemplify the sources of this property through an integrated analysis model, which consists of insights from linguistics, discourse analysis and genre analysis.

2. The release intertextuality

According to R. de Beaugrande and W. Dressler "intertextuality subsumes the ways in which the production and reception of a text depends upon the participants' knowledge of other texts" (1994: 182). They named the process by which this knowledge is applied, mediation, i.e. the active and creative correlation of the text with previously encountered texts.

Intertextuality can also be defined simply as the relationship of a text with other texts. Between texts of the same genre the relationship can be of form and /or content, but between texts of different genres, the relationship can only be of content.

Our knowledge of a text genre takes the form of a global pattern such as a frame, a schema, a scenario or a plan, in which the information is organized according to the communicative conventions of the community which uses it. The release intertextuality is threefold both during its production and during its reception. While producing the release, the PR practitioner uses three kinds of knowledge: of the release, of the subject matter and of the news story. During reception, the journalist uses his knowledge of the release and subject matter, while in the process of acceptance he applies his knowledge of the news story.

Press release			
PR practitioner (produces the release)		**Journalist** (produces the news story)	
		Release reception	Knowledge of release (schema) Knowledge of subject (scenario)
Production	Knowledge of release (schema) Knowledge of the subject matter (scenario) Knowledge of the news story (frame)	**Release acceptance**	Knowledge of news story (frame and scenario)

Experimental psycholinguistics has shown that global patterns act as organizers of the information in a genre text and their application in communication relies on mechanisms by which the general strategies, which control the relationship between the processed text and other genre texts, are applied to concrete situations. A text is understood and interpreted efficiently if the reader can establish connections between the text patterns and the genre patterns. As a consequence, if the release information is organized according to the conventional schema of the release or of the news story, the information will be processed more efficiently and the news story will

be written more effectively. On the contrary, if the structural schema is modified or frame elements are missing, the text comprehension is more difficult.

After describing psycholinguistic tests on the understanding and recalling of text content, Beaugrande and Dressler suggested that there are "systematic tendencies in the interaction of text - presented knowledge and subject matter knowledge" (1994 : 2002), "which refer to the correlation, additions, modifications, and changes of the text - presented knowledge to already stored knowledge" (1994 : 2004). They also suggest that understanding can also be influenced by the context in which processing takes place.

The release comprehension and interpretation cannot be essentially different from those of other genres since these operations are based on psychological mechanisms common to all people. The process variables, however, can be different, and from among them are:

- the participants' generically - structured thematic knowledge (frames, schemas) previously acquired or systematically learned;
- the PR practitioner's and the journalist's competence in processing this genre;
- the processing time.

Thus, genre analysis, discourse analysis and psycholinguistics can significantly contribute to the knowledge of this case of communication through researches into:

- the relationship between the release and the news story at the discursive and textual level;
- the global patterns of the release and of the news story, both of the genre and of the subgenres;
- the impact of context on processing;
- the influence of the quality of textual factors on the release comprehension and acceptance.

3. The release informativity

Informativity was defined by Beaugrande and Dressler as "the extent to which a presentation is new or unexpected for the receiver" (1994:139). They added that the notion usually applies to content, but that it can apply to other language systems, such as the structural or the syntactic ones.

They also mentioned the contextual probability of some communicative occurrences, sustaining that the way in which certain language systems interact to determine such a probability has not been explored sufficiently, although this thing is quite evident. For example, a new or rare conceptual sequence may be expressed by a conventional syntactic sequence (1), or a common conceptual sequence may be expressed by an unusual syntactic sequence (2).

1.   a. Tsunami contributed to cleaning up the beaches.

   b. The project "Protecting the environment" contributed to cleaning up the   beaches.

2.   a. Insulting him will insult me.

b. If you insult him, you insult me.

As can be seen, common or normal communicative sequences are easy to process, while rare or unique sequences cause problems to the receiver.

According to Beaugrande and Dressler, sequences 1.a. & 2.a. are informative, while 1.b. & 2.b. are not, which indicates that these linguists limit informativity to unusual, rare or unique occurrences, which attract the receivers' attention.

I shall use the term "informativity" to refer to the property of texts to transmit information by content and form according to the expectations of the discourse community in which they function as a means of communication. An analytical look at texts will show that informativity is a relative property, which exists and is perceived differently in situation, more exactly depending on the relevance of the information to the social, cultural or professional setting as well as to a specific time and particular place.

Although this meaning of the term is different from that given by Beaugrande and Dressler, their classification of occurrences into three orders of informativity can also be applied from this view of the term.

- The first – order is the lowest and refers to predictable information and obvious facts, which receive little attention from the receiver;
- The second – order refers to probable and frequent information, i.e. common facts.
- The third – order, the highest, refers to less probable information, unusual and infrequent occurrences at least from the receivers' point of view.

(Beaugrande & Dressler 1994:141-144)

Utterances of the third – order are more interesting than those of the other orders, but require much attention and laborious processing from the receiver, who has to be able to establish the meaning continuity of the text and the continuity between the content of utterances and his knowledge of the world.

The question that arises about informativity is then: In relation to what will receivers assess and process the occurrences in a text? In other words, What are the receivers' sources of expectation of informativity?

To the extent to which the sense we give to the term is similar to that proposed by Beaugrande and Dressler, a part of the sources established by the two linguists are also valid in our case. These are:

- the elements and the organization of human situations in the real world integrated into global patterns, such as frames, schemas, scripts plans;
- linguistic techniques for signaling informativity, e.g. placing old and new information in clauses and sentences;
- the context in which the text occurs and is utilized

(Beaugrande & Dressler 1994: 146-150)

In this case, the sources of expectations are the following and in this order of relevance: 1) the context of situation; 2) the real world; 3) the organization of the language (techniques for signaling informativity); 4) the textual superstructure (information organization and ordering).

In certain contexts a fact may be of a lower degree of informativity since it is predictable, but the same fact may be of a higher degree in other contexts. I believe that the source of expectations which determines the other sources and ultimately the degree of informativity is the context, i.e. the professional setting where certain conventions regarding infomativity function. Thus, in journalism, informativity is defined as news value (Randall 1998, Coman 2004, Vasas 2009) which is given by the properties of a fact/event considered to be a piece of news and which are: a) novelty; b) rarity, uniqueness; c) relevance as extension (number of people affected), relevance in time (current or future) or space (the interest area); d) conflictuality.

Even in the same setting, in journalism for example, informativity differs with the textual genre or sub-genre (news story and feature). In public relations, the informativity of informative press releases is different from that of the persuasive releases. However, there may be mixed type releases: informative-persuasive.

In this article I shall treat the mixed type release which makes an announcement, but, at the same time, is intended to persuade. Due to its intertextuality, i.e. its dependence on the news story, the informativity of the release is determined by the informativity of the news story and the announced event will have some of the properties of an occurrence which becomes news, but ordered in a different scale of importance and even having a different content; namely a) relevance; b) novelty; c) uniqueness.

Relevance does not necessarily refer to the number of people who take an interest in or are affected by the event, but to a public with specific interests or identical with those of the organization which announces the event. Novelty refers not so much to events in the near past, but to future events, while uniqueness does not necessarily refer to absolute unusualness, but to a relative one about the organization involved.

The informativity of the informative release manifests itself of three levels of textual structure: a) informational, b) macrotextual (of superstructure), c) microtextual (of sentences and clauses).

4. Analysis of informativity of informative release

The above description of features of informativity suggests a model of analysis of the textual informativity of releases with the following steps:

- analysis of the context in which the release is produced and used, which allows the order of the event to be established;
- analysis of the release conformity with the frame/script of the event;
- analysis of the release conformity with the generic superstructure;
- analysis of the information flow.

We shall exemplify the way the model may be applied by analyzing the following release, which I have translated into English.

IT'S TIME FOR US TO BE DIFFERENT! NOBLE DEEDS ARE FOR NO PAY

Sibiu, April 10, 2008

Between 14-20^{the} April 2008, the National Week of Volunteers envisages activities with, for and about volunteers. "The longest chain made of plastic bottles" and "Adventures of Volunteers", a comedy staged by the volunteers of the Sibiu Red Cross are the main events to which the citizens of Sibiu are invited.

The activities in which the Red Cross will be engaged are supported by GWM Ecologic (Schuster & Go Ecologic), Pro-Vobie – the National Centre for Promoting Volunteer Actions, Sibiu House of Culture, "Avram Iancu" Group of Schools, Radu Selejan Primary School, Sibiu Children's Palace, Sibiu Town Hall .

During the National Week of Volunteers, the Red Cross Volunteers of Sibiu alongside the town's people will try to draw attention to selective rubbish collection by forming "the longest chain of plastic bottles". The townspeople are called to champion the cause by adding a bottle and becoming a IAP (I am Active and Responsible) in less than five minutes, on Tuesday, 15th April from 3 p.m. on "Nicolae Balcescu" Boulevard.

On the stage of Pavilion 2007 the volunteers will play the comedy "Adventures of Volunteers". Entrance to the show is free of charge on Sunday, 20 April, from 9 p.m.

The activities that will take place during the National Week of Volunteers (14-20th April) are intended to highlight the contribution of volunteers to the community development, to mobilize the citizen's support of volunteer actions, and to recognize their merits.

(Distributed at the press conference of Sibiu Red Cross,7th April 2008)

4.1. Analysis of context

We take context to denote the social situation of communication consisting of a Receiver (direct and indirect), Sender (nature/kind and communicative purpose), the Actions of the event (theme, subject, purposes)

The elements of the "Volunteers' release" context have the following values:

Receiver: *direct public*: mass-media: local newspaper, local radio and TV stations; *indirect public*: the inhabitants of Sibiu
Sender: *kind:* international medical organization Sibiu Red Cross,
    communicative purpose: announcing public activities organized by Sibiu volunteers and inviting the population to take part
Actions: theme: contribution of volunteers to the community development; *subjects:* selective rubbish collection and adventures of volunteers; *purposes of actions*: environment protection, mobilization of the town citizens, support for volunteer actions.

The release announces events with relevant subjects to a numerous local public, the inhabitants of a whole city. They are current subjects but also rarely tackled.

Although volunteer actions have become more and more manifest in the social and cultural life of Romania, the population is little aware of its presence in the community and importance to the community and individuals. Therefore, forming a chain of plastic bottles is a novel action, which may arouse the curiosity of Sibiu inhabitants.

The analysis of context shows that the announced event is of the second order of informativity, but one of the actions is of the 3rd order, being rare and unusual.

4.2. Analysis of conformity with the "event" frame

The PR literature has formulated the components of the "event" frame as being: the organization which announces the event, the event itself, the place and time when it takes place, the motive, the scope and way of developing (i.e. answers to questions: Who, What, Where, When, Why, How)

The values of these elements in our case study are:

Organization: Red Cross, branch of Sibiu
Event: Public activity with, for and about volunteers
Place: The city of Sibiu, "Nicolae Balcescu" Boulevard, Pavilion 2007
Date and hour: 15th April, 3 p.m.; 20th April 9 p.m.
Purpose: Mobilizing the citizens' support for volunteer actions.
Mode: Forming a chain of plastic bottles; Performing a play about volunteers

This level of analysis shows that the text gives the expected information about the frame elements, the answers to the well-known questions Who, What, Where, When, Why and How.

4.3. Analysis of conformity with the superstructure of the sub-genre "announcement"

This analysis can be carried but by comparing the superstructure of the analyzed release with the canonical form of the sub-genre superstructure. For this purpose we have used the canonical superstructure established by the research team of the project "Professional genres in public administration"(Superceanu et al 2006:173-174)

Move 1.	Announcing the event
Step1.	Announcing the place and time of event
Step 2.	Stating the subject of event
Step 3.	Announcing the organizers of event
Move 2.	Describing the event
Step 1.	Announcing the participants
Step 2.	Stating the purpose of event

Step 3.   Describing the actions of event
Move 3.   Describing the content of event
Step 1.   Stating previous similar events
Step 2.   Stating similar event that will follow
Move 4.   Describing the status of the organization
Move 5.   Announcing the sponsors.

The analysis of our release has shown the following superstructure:

Move 1.   Announcing the event
Step 1.   Stating the time of the event
Step 2.   Stating the subject
Step 3.   Announcing the organizers
Move 2.   Announcing the sponsors
Move 3.   Describing the event
Step 1.   Describing the first action
Step 2.   Describing the second action
Move 4.   Stating the purpose of the event

The content of the two superstructures shows the following differences at the level of moves.

Canonical Superstructure	*Release superstructure*
M 1	M 1
M 2	M 5
M 3	M 3
M 4	S 2, M 2
M 5	

As can be seen, the analyzed release does not have the expected superstructure, the sponsors being announced in paragraph 2. This modification of the canonical superstructure indicates a deficient intertextuality of the release, which will be a challenge for the receiver and also indicates the relationship of dependence between the informativity and the intertextuality of the release.

4.4 Analysis of information flow

This analysis is intended to highlight the thematic structure of the text, the preponderant thematization and the placement of the new and old information. The analysis of the release has shown a complex thematization of all paragraphs, the focused informative elements being the actors and the period of time.

Step 1: Between the 14-20th April 2008, The National Week of Volunteers….

Step 2: The activities which the Romanian Red Cross will carry out …..
Step 3: During the National Week of Volunteers, the volunteers of the Romanian Red Cross….
Step 4: The activities carried out between the 14-20th April 2008……

The new information occurs in the rheme in all sentences or clauses, except in sentence 2, where the information occurs in the theme. Both the thematization and the placement of the new information in the rheme contribute to the high informativity of the release, which facilitates communication and storage through two acts:

- reiteration of the period when the event will take place;
- the consistent placement of the new information, which does not require the reader to divert his/her attention and alternate the comprehension strategies.

5. Conclusions

By approaching the release intertextuality from the perspective of text linguistics and psycholinguistics, the article has put forward the hypothesis that its intertextuality is threefold, requiring knowledge of the release schema, of the subject matter script and of the news article frame. It has also evinced research directions of this insufficiently studied property.

As for the release informativity, the article has proposed a more realistic definition, in contrast to the definition of informativity given by linguists, which is limited to the unusualness, rarity and uniqueness. The study of the expectation sources of the release has shown that they are: the context of situation, the event frame, and the information organization at the macro and micro level. The model of analysis proposed here, useful both for didactic and research purposes, may identify the degree of informativity as well as shortcomings of actual releases.

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