# СОВРЕМЕННЫЙ РОССИЙСКИЙ ПУБЛИЧНЫЙ ДИСКУРС: ВЕДУТ ЛИ ТЕХНОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ НОВШЕСТВА К НОВЫМ ДИСКУРСИВНЫМ СТРАТЕГИЯМ ИЛИ НОВОМУ МИРОВОЗЗРЕНИЮ

**М. Б. Бергельсон** (mirabergelson@gmail.com)

Филологический факультет МГУ, Москва, Россия

В данном исследовании современный русский публичный дискурс рассматривается в его электронном варианте, что позволяет взглянуть на используемые в блогах дискурсивные стратегии с точки зрения отражаемых ими изменений в социокультурных и лингвопргагматических паттернах коммуникативного поведения.

**Ключевые слова:** публичный дискурс, блог, дискурсивные стратегии, паттерны, коммуникативное поведение

# MODERN RUSSIAN PUBLIC DISCOURSE: DO CHANGES IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY LEAD TO NEW DISCOURSE STRATEGIES, OR TO NEW WORLDVIEW?

**M. B. Bergel'son** (mirabergelson@gmail.com)

Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russian Federation

This study aims at looking into various formats of modern Russian-language internet communication in order to discover changes in sociocultural patterns and models of the discourse behavior that characterize values and norms of the contemporary Russian public life. Specifi c public discourse genres — high offi cials' internet blogs — are analyzed with a special emphasis on whether the public discourse represented in the modern electronic modes is different in the language used from that of the traditional offi cial discourse. This analysis should allow to better understand ideas and

beliefs prevailing in the Russian public opinion, to trace its changes and emerging linguistic patterns.

## Project goals

This study aims at looking into various formats of modern Russian-language communication to discover sociocultural patterns and models of the discourse behavior that characterize values and norms of the contemporary Russian public life. Specific public discourse genres are singled out and analyzed with a special emphasis on the public discourse represented in the modern electronic modes. This analysis should allow to better understand ideas and beliefs prevailing in the Russian public opinion, to trace its changes and emerging linguistic patterns.

The project is a part of a broader comparative cross-cultural study of sociocultural foundations of discourse interpretation. I see discourse interpretation as one important instrument of analysis to discover values and norms prevailing in a given sociocultural group, which, in its turn, is essential for understanding and predicting any sound and sensible public behavior, including communication. This connection between discourse analysis revealing changes in cultural patterns that underlie public discourse, and well-grounded predictions of the changes in public discourse itself makes this project relevant for multidisciplinary studies of modern Russian-language communication.

## Context

All linguistic models admit that language functions both as an informational and an interactional system. At the same time an overwhelming majority of mainstream linguistic models occupy themselves with various mechanisms of information processing and consider the interactive component as some sort of additional topping on the informational substance of a message. However, if we admit that communication is a goal-driven activity, then study of the ways we reach our goal in communication, of the ability of natural language speakers to communicate more than what is explicitly stated and be successful in their communication by maintaining interpersonal harmony and complying with sociocultural norms, lies in the heart of any comprehensive linguistic model.

As knowledge-based interaction communication can only be successful when the participants share culturally determined communicative competence acquired in the processes of primary socialization. Thus, cognitive schemas of sociocultural knowledge and competences are central to any studies of the so-called 'national communication styles'. Though the very term of a 'national communication style' is quite misleading and sometimes even considered obsolete, it is possible to avoid

the kind of false generalizations it implies by introducing a concept of specific communication contexts, or *discourse genres*. If *discourse events* are units (not necessarily elementary ones), to be used to describe communication process, then discourse genres will be relevant *types* of discourse events that will allow to discriminate between the communication contexts. Then generalizations of various kinds, including that of national communication styles, can be made in terms of specific discourse genres (DG) and allow comparisons between both various DGs within one languaculture (Agar 1994) and similar DGs in different cultures. Furthermore it allows to arrive at a classification and to relate DGs to the existing genres of modern Russian public communication (cf. with oral speech genres in Russian National Corpus www.russcorpora.ru ). Discourse communities (Swales 1990), (Scollon and Scollon 2001) have their specific clusters of DGs and thus can be determined by the latter.

## Hypothesis

Communication patterns that may emerge as different DGs are organized along interactional and information-handling dimensions. Both dimensions are regulated by means of special type of rules, namely *pragmatic principles*, which determine choice of linguistic form not on the basis of grammar or world-knowledge, but based on the fact that language in its communicative function is a form of sensible and goal-driven activity.

Information-handling dimension embraces various strategies ranging in scope from a clause to larger discourse units level. It deals with fore- and backgrounding and cognitive accessibility of information reflected in the information structure of a clause/sentence, and content organization beyond the sentence boundaries. One way to understand which ideas are highly topical for and prevalent in the Russian society is to study information-handling public discourse strategies.

Interactional dimension deals with 'politeness phenomena' (Brown and Levinson 1987) which involve presentation of self, distribution of talk, and Face Threatening Acts with numerous politeness strategies to mitigate them.

I assume that there is an underlying principle of *Pragmatic Control* that is responsible for various aspects of interaction between participants in discourse; for both linguistic politeness and its conscious and accepted absence. Pragmatic Control (PC) is a degree of the Speaker's assessment of her/his right to certain communicative behavior towards the Addressee. This right motivates the Speaker's decision to use politeness strategies and to choose among them. Politeness is but an instance of Pragmatic Control principle. Incidentally, the politeness strategies hierarchy is based on speakers' assessment of the degree of pragmatic control they possess in a current discourse event with a given addressee. In certain cases even highly face-threatening acts are performed without any mitigation. The way pragmatic control is expressed in various public discourse events and shared between various discourse participants sheds light on distribution of power and potential changes in contemporary Russians' worldview.

## Research objectives

1. To analyze public discourse in terms of its content, message and targeted areas.
2. To arrive at a typology of public discourse genres based on the message, area and participants.
3. To analyze Russian public discourse from the interactional point of view: participants, way and degree of interaction, linguistic mechanisms of interaction.
4. To analyze Russian public discourse in electronic media as one highly interactional channel of communication and elicit changes in interactional strategies.

## Research data and primary results

The crucial data for this project can be found in various instances of public electronic discourse — a new (at least for Russia), dynamic and highly interactive discourse genre. It is well represented in various blogs of Russian public figures, officials (see for example http://gosblogi.ru/opml.xml) and especially that of the champion of the public internet discourse — President Medvedev (http://blog.kremlin.ru, http://community.livejournal.com/blog_medvedev). These blogs demonstrate changes in different strategies pertaining to public discourse. The information-handling side of the electronic public discourse is well represented in the personal live-journals of the high officials (primary data is taken from the livejournals of governors, mayors, and vice-mayors) and is mostly related to a funny mix of formal and informal registers, where the formal register is abundant with the typical bureaucratic expressions and constructions. The informal register is characterized by use of interactional discourse markers addressed to the audience, borrowings from the oral speech and specific internet jargon, which is an absolute innovation in the public figures' written discourse. It is worth noting that the degree of informality is never close to that of the private persons in their blogs or livejournals. One nice difference is that the officials promote spelling and punctuation rules.

1. (1)[1]
*Многие, абсолютно справедливо, возмущаются состоянием тротуаров. Проведенные в декабре конкурсы в районах определили* <u>подрядные организации по содержанию тротуаров в 2011 году</u>. ***Увы****, многие из них* <u>не имеют опыта работы в городском хозяйстве</u>.
..........
<u>С учетом предложений районных администраций</u>, *Депутатов Городской Думы, ГИБДД и читателей блога,* <u>был сформирован перечень объектов площадью свыше 1-го миллиона квадратных метров</u>. ***Всем большое спасибо!***
*В декабре, ознакомившись с опубликованным Бюджетом РФ, выяснилось,*

---

[1]  <u>Underlined</u> are official, specifically bureaucratic style constructions and expression, while informal, oral speech pieces are in **bold**.

*что сумма 1 033 млн рублей сохранилась, но была поделена на 2 части. 344 млн. рублей на ремонт дорог, 689 млн. рублей на ремонт дворовых территорий.* **Вот и приходится 2/3 списка вырезать. Искренне жаль.** *Несомненно, ремонтировать дворы надо, но за счет дорожного ремонта,* **на мой взгляд**, *не разумно.*

http://lipovich.livejournal.com/

1.(2).

*Весь прошедший месяц был неактивен в* **инете**. *Думал*, **«опахивал» столицу**, *формируя программу развития экономики региона на ближайшие 2011 и 2012 годы. Нужно привлечь значительные инвестиционные ресурсы, чтобы обеспечить серьезный рост бюджетных поступлений. Достаточно напряженный, но продуктивный месяц, пока говорить о намерениях не буду, увидите позже.*

………..

*С Новым Годом! Думаю, что у всех моих* **френдов** *и читателей все хорошо и праздники прошли весело.* **Я же просто спал, читал и молчал, за год наговорился : )))**

*Традиционно в конце года выступаю с отчетом перед общественностью: что сделано, что не получилось и почему, планы в наступающем году.*

http://alexandr-jilkin.livejournal.com/

Both Medvedev's blogs are moderated for obscenities and off-topic content only. The Medvedev's livejournal blog in particular allows posts and free discussion (comments and new posts within a thread, starting a new thread, etc). One should yet see what the political and social implications of this, so unusual for Russian politics, enterprise will be. One may only hope that the desired outcomes of openness, transparency of decision-making, so much expected shift to the e-government, will be visible and will give tangible results. Along with this there are certain linguistic phenomena related to politeness and pragmatic control. Analyzing the data from the Dmitry Medvedev's bog at http://blog.kremlin.ru I am looking primarily at modes of address and degrees of informality.

In Russia, with its highly hierarchical, high-distance-power culture, vertical communication in public discourse (especially when addressing high officials) is extremely deferential and formal. On the other hand, normally electronic discourse in blogs is an example of the exactly opposite interactive behavior. It is probably no surprise that the President Medvedev's blogs give evidence of something in-between. And not in a mixed way — like working out rules for some 'intermediate level' of politeness — but in a split way. The examples of different posts from the kremlin.ru blog illustrating these tendencies are shown below. Some posts are quite deferential, with traditional greeting and leaving formulae — *(Глубоко)уважаемый Дмитрий Антольевич!* , *Спасибо за внимание, Жду ответа* (approx. 30%), while others are following the rules of a typical electronic discourse leaving out greetings and goodbyes, using conversational language and even slangish expressions — see (1), (3). Of course when the author of a comment addresses not the President, but

some other participant on the blog (they mark it by putting the nick of the Addressee at the beginning of their own comment) the style may be considered even more informal — see (4).

2. (1).

*непейвода евгений, Красноярский край 1 декабря 2009 20:27*

**здрав дмит анат**. *в милиции беспредел. хотят сажают, хотят сами стреляют. А прокуратура требует с них показателей. а суды? просто умора. сделают по закону , так прокурор оспаривает и себе галочку. все повязаны. адвокатов ни во что не ставят. в лесосибирске вообще полный беспредел. все менты коммерсанты. даже начальник ГОВД лесом занимается , а служба безопас его покрывает. осетриной торгуют. а простых под суд. в крае вообще творится нечто. хлопонин бизнесмен всех под себя подмял. народ в нищете. они жируют. малый бизнес закрывается. главное что молодежь уезжает, значит перспективы нет. вмешайтесь в проблему малых городов типа нашего. все федеральные органы продажны. а прокурор молодой себе карьеру делает. стряпает не существующие дела. ну и про себя не забывает. тем более он засланный казачок, не местный. живет в служебной квартире. на выходные в центр уезжает. бросается только общими словами. главный мент весь в торговле. неугодных убирает. под суд. у них одна проблема. лишь бы посадить чиновника. а между собой разберуться или поделят . для галочки. город у нас небольшой, но перспективный. увы, все в руках непонятных людей с москвы и красноярска. развития нет. нужно ваше вмешательство.*

2. (2).

*Filinova, Московская область 1 декабря 2009 18:25*

**Глубокоуважаемый Дмитрий Анатольевич**, *только благодаря обращению к Вам лично мне удалось получить ответ о гражданстве в РФ(многие госучреждения отписываются, при том очень даже изобретательно). Теперь новый вопрос опять к Вам, как юристу, по защите прав садоводческих некоммерческих товариществ…..*

2. (3).

*Влад, Республика Саха (Якутия) 4 декабря 2009 11:48*

*Читаю комментарии и думаю: дурак начальник-горе для подчинённых (русская народная пословица). А вывод такой: дурак подчинённый, который, пытаясь избавиться от горя, идёт к начальнику.*

2. (4).

*Приятель, Санкт-Петербург 3 декабря 2009 00:32*

*Диме Рудакову (Калужская область, 02.12.2009, 13:32):*

*Дима, ну о каких налоговых льготах вы говорите! Не будут они этого делать. Наоборот, как мне сказали налоговые инспектора (кстати, в суде по поводу взыскания налогов), сейчас дана установка тянуть по полной*

*не только с бизнеса, но даже с обычных граждан.*

*Потому что федералы сейчас обеспечивают соцобязательства субъектов РФ, которые формально находятся в ведении этих самых субъектов, а на практике — уже давно финансируются Москвой. В условиях кризиса нагрузка в этой части на Ф. Бюджет всё больше. Вот и собирают с мира по нитке. А вы говорите о налоговых льготах. Если надо -они последнее с бизнеса и с нас снимут, лишь бы потом эти бабки в рамках социалки частично раскидать, чтобы народ на баррикады не пошел, а частично освоить. Надо понимать, у ребят в Москве думалка работает по-советски: в одном месте взять, в другое место отдать, а если в этом месте разворуют — ну и х... с ним. Главное — создать видимость, что они нас поддерживают. Это чтобы мы не замечали, что всё разваливается.*

<div align="right">http://blog.kremlin.ru/post/50?page=2</div>

Even these few examples demonstrate how split is Russian society both in terms of public issues and linguistic behavior. To work out parameters and find models that will allow to describe various vectors of potential changes in the ways relevant public issues are raised and discussed are among the main goals of this study. Still, as this project has been taken up as a longitudinal study, a year later the data from the presidential blog (again, I am looking only at the comments to the Medvedev's posts) shows more serious level of discussion.

About 50% of 121 comments to the post of January 17, 2011 on corruption (http://blog.kremlin.ru/post/136?) don't address Medvedev. They are addressed to the multiple Addressee — the community. Sometimes it is done explicitly (*Добрый вечер всем!*). Another half addresses President himself. Just a few of these greetings (3) use a highly deferential form (*Глубокоуважаемый Дмитрий Анатольевич!*), others are mostly low Power, neutral Distance greetings (*Уважаемый Дмитрий Анатольевич!, Дмитрий Анатольевич,*). A few others will be low Power, wide Distance greetings (*Господин Президент!*).

Leaving formulae are skipped, which is typical of electronic discourse. Emotionality is much higher than accepted in the traditional public discourse, but evidently more in compliance with acceptable ways of expressing anger, frustration and irony than a year ago. There is significantly less direct complaints, which brings discussion to a more professional level. Specific cases of corruption are brought in with names and places, but more as examples and arguments to the case.

To sum it up, there is evidence for special markers of a specific discourse genre being developed in front of our eyes. This, in its turn, allows to single out parameters that may be used to define and describe a given discourse genre — public electronic discourse: modes of address, presence or absence of leaving formulae, presence or absence of persuasive type of discourse, level of formality, interactional markers in addressing the community, the 'normality' of discourse, and adherence to the spelling and punctuation rules.

# References

1. *Abramova A. A.* 2005. Linguistic Characteristics of Electronic Communication [Lingvisticheskie Osobennosti Elektronnogo Obshcheniia].
2. *Agar M.* 1994. Language Shock: Understanding the Culture of Conversation.
3. *Bakhtin M. M.* 1953.The Problem of Speech Genres [Problema Rechevykh zhanrov]. Estetika Slovesnogo Tvorchestva : 237–280.
4. *Bergel'son M. B.* 2002. Linguistic Aspects of Virtual Communication [Iazykovye Aspekty Virtual'noi Kommunikatsii]. Vestnik MGU. Ser.19. Lingvistika I Mezhkul'turnaia Kommunikatsiia.
5. *Bergel'son M.* 2011. Russian Cultural Values and Workplace Communication Patterns. Intercultural Communication: A Reader.
6. *Palmer G. B.* 1996. Toward a Theory of Cultural Linguistics.
7. *Ratmayr R.* 1998. Hoeflichkeit als kulturspezifisches Konzept. Russisch im Vergleich :174–182.
8. *Riazantseva T. N.* 2007. Some Peculiarities of the Realization of Communicative Principles and Strategies in the face of Computer Media Communication [Nekotorye Osobennosti Realizatsii Kommunikativnykh Printsipov I Strategii v Usloviiakh Komp'iuterno-obuslovlennogo Obshcheniia]. Vestnik MGU. Ser. 19, Lingvistika I Mezhkul'turnaia Kommunikatsiia :202–211.
9. *Scollon R., Scollon S. B. K.* 2001.Intercultural Communication : a Discourse Approach.
10. *Swales J.* 1990. Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings.
11. *http://alexandr-jilkin.livejournal.com/*
12. *http://blog.kremlin.ru*
13. *http://lipovich.livejournal.com/*