

Chapter 1:

Genre Classification and persuasiveness

Modern television broadcasters generally use two types of information strips which, for the sake of brevity, we will call “moving” and “fixed” here. The first type is sometimes called *tekst taśmowy* (‘tape text’) in Polish academic literature (Trojanowska-Bis, Francuz 2007) or referred to with the English term *ticker* (also *TV-ticker*; other names include *scroll* or *crawl*). In contrast, the fixed strip, which is the actual topic of this report, has not yet received any universally accepted typological name as a genre of media texts. One may notice, however, that in public discourse in Poland, a common name of this genre that has become established (or maybe even entrenched), is *pasek* (a strip) which is the basis even for the derivation *paskowy* (‘the person who writes the texts put on strips’)¹⁶ (cf. Kłosińska 2019). In the absence of any other term, we decided to use the name *strip* to name the short still text preceding the actual journalistic material displayed in all capitals against a blue background in the lower third of the screen (about a quarter of the distance from the bottom) – see the image below.

From the point of view of communication pragmatics, a strip so defined closely resembles the genres of *title* and *headline* for reading materials (i.e. *de facto* press materials), well described in Polish media literature (with a linguistic slant). Without entering into detailed considerations here, we will assume that the fixed strip on the TV screen performs the same

16 See <http://www.nowewyrazy.uw.edu.pl>.



Figure 1. A still image of the screen of *Wiadomości TVP 1* aired on October 10, 2017 with the strip: *Young doctors demand over 9,000 zloty salaries.*

communication functions as the (printed) press *headline* reduced only to the main section (*title*). We will do so because, in our opinion, the reception of both types of statements is similar – the recipient first reads the header or the text in the strip, then receives the text of the actual message (we omit here the issues related to psychological differences in the perception of single-code materials, i.e. print, and multi-code materials, i.e. television).¹⁷ Such an assumption is also supported by the fact that the fixed TV information strips after airing the appropriate message later become – looking at it from the formal side – the titles of these materials when they are published on the Internet (on the broadcaster’s official website).

According to Wojtak, the header/title of a news item has three basic functions: appellative (naming the text), descriptive or summarizing (presenting the content), and pragmatic or persuasive (influencing the recipient) (Wojtak 2004, p. 21 ff.; see also Pisarek 1967, 1969; Gajda 1987, p. 81; Bereś 2005). In the following analyses, we did not address the appellative function of the strips (due to its rather obvious nature) and we fo-

¹⁷ This point of view (sequential reception of the respective utterance segments) is predominant in Polish source literature. Cf. for example: Wojtak 2004, Pisarek 1965, Furman 2006, Pałuszyńska 2006, and Ślawska 2008.

cused mainly on the description of linguistic resources used by the authors of the strips in their descriptive and persuasive functions.

The **descriptive function** of the strips is expressed primarily through the use of means independent of the sender, and their **persuasive function**, in contrast, through the use of means dependent on the sender, marked axiologically in order to influence the recipient's behavior.

Two main types of fixed strips are in use: a) the headline type, comprising strips announcing the content of the footage, which indicate its content, summarizing the most important message and highlighting the main circumstance of the event (in keeping with Pisarek's approach to the function of the press headline, cf. Pisarek 1967, pp. 25–28); strips of this type usually do not contain a verb – they are typically in the form of an individual phrase or a verbless sentence; b) a type redundant in regard to spoken text – such strips constitute a summary, exposing the most important thoughts or describing events presented in the video footage; they can take the form of both a nominal group and a sentence (cf. Kłosińska 2019). The material studied here is dominated by strips of the first type.

The persuasive potential of the strips is enormous. On the one hand, this results from the use by the broadcaster of selected linguistic resources, marked in terms of value, as mentioned above, but also from the genre-related characteristics of the text. This means that the same linguistic resources that would not have a persuasive function in a text belonging to some other media genre (especially journalistic), as they are part of the vocabulary that constitutes such a genre, e.g. a commentary or a column. However, when used in the text of a strip, they do acquire persuasive power. On the other hand, those resources which already have systemic persuasive (evaluative) properties (i.e. regardless of the genre of the statement and its context), increase their power of influence on the recipient when used in the text of a strip (cf. Kłosińska 2019). In the present report, we accept Pisarek's position, expressed as follows: "In practice, we learn about the persuasive character of a particular text first of all by the presence of persuasive means, secondly by the means which acquire persuasive power only in a given text, thirdly, by the structure of this text, fourthly, we conclude that such a character of the text is derived from our knowledge of the sender's intentions" (Pisarek 2003, p. 13). However, we would like to add to this list a fifth indicator of persuasiveness, namely, the genre of the text.

The persuasiveness of the genre in question, i.e. fixed TV strips, results from three specific circumstances in which these texts function in communication practice. The first is that **the strip occupies a strategic position in the text** – which is connected with the fact that as a kind of “title tag” of the following material, the strip can be identified by the viewers with the information proper, i.e. it can in a way even “replace” the information itself (by providing the basic information about the event, its most important components, and its evaluation), especially for those viewers who are not interested in a particular subject or who view the message only superficially. Similar processes are observed in relation to the functioning of news headlines on websites of internet news services (for more on this, see Zimny 2013, p. 596).

The second circumstance is the **susceptibility of this genre structure to ritualization** – due to the specificity of the communication situation (multi-code transmission, integrated attention¹⁸ and distracting factors, the very limited capacity of the carrier, transient visual exposure to the message), the sender is more inclined to look for ‘mental shortcuts’ than in the case of other genre forms, often taking the form of what are called style phraseemes.¹⁹ Since television news services repeat information on a particular subject (often concerning complex events and processes), there is a marked tendency to ritualize the language of the strips, that is to put it together of with ready-made ‘prefabricated’ linguistic elements (clichés, discursive phrases, linguistic stereotypes).

The third circumstance results from the recipient’s communicative expectations. In the case of information strips, the recipient predominantly anticipates **being informed rather than persuaded**, which results in the strips being perceived primarily from the perspective of being information, rather than persuasion, as messages that are objective rather than evaluative by their very nature. This further strengthens their persuasive power

18 Cf. “If the redundancy is high, it is assumed that viewers use integrated attention, which does not have to be split between the incoming channels. If there is an absence of redundancy, the viewer’s reaction will be switching to differentiating attention, which results from the inconsistency between the channels of transmission” (Trojanowska-Bis, Francuz 2007, p. 70).

19 “We may speak of a style phraseeme when a given word entails, both in the transmission and reception of a text (cf. the phenomenon of predictability), another word, not required functionally, i.e. one that may either be omitted with no detriment to the texts’ informativity, or replaced by another word, while their co-occurrence is motivated only by the fact that in other texts of a given type these very words have cooccurred sufficiently often” (Bralczyk 2001, p. 51).

because, according to the research of psychologists, viewers tend not to distinguish between facts and opinions in programs belonging to informational genres.²⁰ For more considerations on these questions, see Kłosińska (2019).

20 Cf. “[...] Viewers of *Wiadomości* treat most of the information as facts and generally do not recognize the opinions of the people who are speaking on television. It may be concluded from this that TV viewers treat the news presented to them as a faithful account of a given state of affairs, but they do not recognize opinions incorporated in the news. [...] The only case in which the majority of viewers correctly recognized an opinion was a sentence in which of the person expressing it was clearly identified. It appears that the recipients are able to distinguish opinion from fact if they are informed who formulated the opinion, that is, if they can identify the source of the information. In addition, [...] it has been found that repeating an opinion which contains a clearly defined entity expressing a given assessment even doubles the likelihood of confusing it with fact” (Trojanowska-Bis, Francuz 2007, p. 71).