

The Axiological Basis of Journalism as Reflected in the Discourse of National Codes of Journalistic Ethics

Aksjologiczne podstawy dziennikarstwa odzwierciedlone w dyskursie narodowych kodeksów etyki dziennikarskiej

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journalistic discourse, national Codes of Journalistic Ethics, professional communicative personality, professional identity of a journalist

Słowa kluczowe

dyskurs dziennikarski, krajowe kodeksy etyki dziennikarskiej, zawodowa komunikatywna osobowość zawodowa, tożsamość zawodowa dziennikarza

Abstract

Professional journalistic conduct, being governed by seemingly identical norms and standards around the world, shows tremendous variations in different cultural/national traditions. This paper attempts to explain the difference while examining the axiological foundations of professional journalistic discourse. The research is done on the example of Belarus' and English-speaking countries' codes of journalistic ethics – texts written by journalists to journalists about journalism. Through consistent reconstruction of a discourse portrait of a journalist generated in/by the discourse, the cognitive and behavioural patterns shared among the professionals trained within the corresponding culture are revealed. The analysis explains the crisis that Belarusian journalism faced during electoral and post-electoral period in 2020 through a clash of common human values and particular values of professional discourse (and, thus, behaviour) of journalists. The research also allows implications for improvements to educational curriculum for journalists.

Abstrakt

Profesjonalne postępowanie dziennikarskie pozornie rządzi się identycznymi standardami i normami na całym świecie. Wykazuje jednak ogromne różnice w różnych tradycjach kulturowych/narodowych. W tym artykule podjęto próbę wyjaśnienia tej różnicy, równocześnie badając aksjologiczne podstawy dyskursu dziennikarskiego. Badania zostały przeprowadzone na podstawie białoruskich i anglojęzycznych kodeksów etyki dziennikarskiej - tekstów pisanych przez dziennikarzy o dziennikarstwie i kierowanych do dziennikarzy. Poprzez konsekwentne odtworzenie obrazu dyskursu dziennikarskiego stworzonego w/ poprzez ten dyskurs ujawniają się poznawcze i behawioralne wzorce wspólne dla profesjonalistów przeszkolonych w ramach danej kultury.

Analiza wyjaśnia kryzys, jakim dotknięte było dziennikarstwo białoruskie w okresie wyborczym i powyborczym 2020 roku poprzez zderzenie wspólnych wartości ludzkich i pewnych, konkretnych wartości dyskursu zawodowego (a tym samym zachowań) dziennikarzy. Badanie pozwala również na wprowadzenie ulepszeń programu nauczania dla dziennikarzy.

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Introduction

The idea for this article appeared two years ago when, with the light hand of the students of my course “Critical approach to journalistic discourse”, a comparative analysis of Belarus’ and English-speaking countries’ Codes of Journalistic Ethics was carried out. Treating the Codes as contemporary discourses (rather than texts), the research aimed to reconstruct the social reality of specific professional communities encrypted in these discourses. The tools of discourse analysis enabled to “clean up” the prototypic content of the Codes discourse and see the values and patterns of professional behaviour which are fixed in the Codes – texts that professionals wrote for professionals. As a result, it became possible to assume what a professional communicative identity¹ of a journalist trained on the basis of national code of professional ethics might look like.

¹ Further in the paper ‘professional communicative personality’ is treated as an expected outcome of the approach to vocational training that incorporates ethical and interpersonal aspects of professional identity development; such a personality is able to think critically, assess the context of professional and social interaction and, hence, identify a unique situation in terms of concrete communicative steps necessary to be taken. This approach is based on the works by D. Gibso, C.T. Dollarhide, J.M. Moss (D. Gibso, C.T. Dollarhide, J.M. Moss, *Professional Identity Development: A Grounded Theory of Transformational Tasks of New Counselors*, “Counselor Education & Supervision” 2010, No 50, p. 21-38); N. Hamilton (N. Hamilton, *Assessing Professionalism: Measuring Progress in the Formation of an Ethical Professional Identity*. “University of St. Thomas Law Journal” 2008, No 5, p. 470-511); E.F. Zeyer, D.P. Zavodchikov (E.F. Zeyer, D.P. Zavodchikov. (red.), *Razvitiye lichnosti v sisteme neprerivnogo professionalnogo obrazovaniya: kollektivnaya monografiya*, Yekaterinburg: RGPPU 2013 [Зееер Э.Ф., Заводчиков Д.П. (ред.), *Развитие личности в системе непрерывного профессионального образования: коллективная монография*. Екатеринбург: РГППУ 2013]); V.V. Serikov (V.V. Serikov, *Obrazovaniye i lichnost. Teoria i praktika proyektirovaniya pedagogicheskikh sistem, napravlennikh na razvitiye lichnosti uchaschikhsya*, Moskwa: Izdatelskaya korporatsiya „Logos” 1999 [Сериков В.В., *Образование и личность. Теория и практика проектирования педагогических систем, направленных на развитие личности учащихся*. Москва: Издательская корпорация “Логос” 1999]).

Although the results of this small study, as well as the very practice of conducting it, became an integral part of the course “Critical approach to journalistic discourse”, they have not been published as a separate article so far. They were doomed to remain just working materials until recent political turmoil unleashed in Belarus (the country whose code of ethics was the main object for the study).

Since the beginning of presidential campaign, and especially after the presidential elections on August 9, 2020, Belarusian journalism witnessed a struggle of values, universal and professional ones, which triggered irreversible changes in Belarusian journalistic community. The practice of information filtering (reporting only selected and thoroughly prepared information that maintains the victorious image of President Lukashenko’s regime), which was a long-lasting reality of Belarusian information space, could no longer be tolerated as a normal conduct by the public and the journalists themselves. As a result, the journalistic community divided into those who remained loyal to the government (and habitual professional practice) and those who opposed. It is not an exaggeration to say that before 2020 the split between State and opposition media in Belarus was not that implacable – they used to approach the same facts from different perspectives but never before the objective facts of social life were depicted as if belonging to different realities.

During the first two weeks after the Presidential elections, the massive protests against the unprecedented falsification of the election results and the use of violence and torture against peaceful demonstrators were not covered by state media at all. It lasted until the leading personnel of those media started to leave (e.g. Radio Stalitsa (Radio Capital) lost almost all their staff). When it was no longer possible to hide the existence of demonstrations and popular discontent, pro-governmental media started to report the ‘official data’ about the scale of protests, significantly reducing the reported number of protests participants. For the sake of propaganda potential, state TV channels (Belarus 1, ONT, STV) had to invite “specialists” from Russia. The conduct of the journalists from pro-governmental media who agreed to give distorted information about protests or to just silence it, who chose to work within propaganda paradigm instead of information one, prompted legitimate misunderstanding and concern in public opinion.

Amid a backdrop of massive protests and information war inside the country, the authorities launched a wave of illegal detentions of active protest leaders, ordinary protestants, and journalists of opposition media (e.g. during the week from August 4 to August 11, 50 journalists were detained; 50 more journalists were arrested on August 27, 2020; 6 journalists from op-

position media were arrested on September 1, 2020 while working in the streets and reporting about students protests, they were subsequently tried for violation of procedures for organising and holding demonstrations and other public events). Such non-governmental print media as *Komsomolskaya Pravda in Belarus* and *Narodnaya Volya*, two most popular print editions, were denied any opportunity to be published and distributed by State service providers. The Ministry of Information blocked access to some online platforms that provided information about the presidential elections (belarus2020.org, zubr.in, etc.) and limited access to many others (priaries.by, udf.by, progomel.by, virtualbrest.by, tsepkalo.info, tsepkalo.com, honestby.org, babariko.vision, agitka2020.co, statkevich.org, etc.)

Witnessing these events in the country during the political crisis in August-September 2020, I decided to publish this small research as it may shed some light on why a habitual truth-refining Belarusian journalistic practice was accepted and exercised for so long. Although the study object includes the professional discourse of journalists (represented by Belarus' and English-speaking countries' Codes of Journalists Ethics) and the values that are represented in/by it, my focus is on the explanation of how the values codified in the Belarusian Code of Journalistic Ethics predetermine professional behaviours of Belarusian journalists. I also pay attention to an important implication from this study – some improvements to educational curriculum for journalists.

Background on Codes of Journalist Ethics

The international Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists, adopted by 1954 World Congress of the International Federation of Journalists and amended by the 1986 World Congress, makes a common ground for the professional journalists of over 100 countries and guides everyday practices of almost 500, 000 practitioners around the globe. Thanks to it and the UNESCO Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media, the professional conduct of journalists seems to be universal for all the practitioners regardless of their geography. However, case studies into national journalistic practices, assessed as ethical at the local level, expose flouting violations and inconsistencies with the international ethical norms. Thus, while interviewing experts in journalism on the consistency of Brazilian journalistic practice with international principles of ethical professional conduct, H.G. Herscovitz illuminates tremendous difference in opinions that separates the Brazilian practitioners who believe in their being in line with the American standards and some critics who accuse the former

of “flawed imitation of American and European media systems”². Another example of adjusting professional ethics to the laws of a particular country is analysed by J. Piecowye while describing his experience of covering a situation when the British couple was arrested and convicted for kissing in public on radio broadcast in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Being the host of an English-language talk radio format program, the author had to weigh global media ethics against local sensibility, the organization’s regulations, institutional codes of conduct, and regional morality³.

The abovementioned examples just start an endless list of cases every journalist encounters daily when a practitioner has to marry the theory of journalism ethics to its practice. And although culture is an evident and objective distinguisher that can explain and advocate the allegations of “professional misconduct” and “poor ethics”, the concept is not always accepted as research category in comparative studies of ethics in journalism.

One of the most comprehensive comparisons of Codes of Journalistic Ethics was carried out by I. Himelboim and Y. Limor, who analysed the perception of the cornerstone concept for media, that of freedom, as seen in 242 cases across the world. The authors, though, were primarily concerned with the interrelations of the way freedom is perceived by journalists and media organizations with the type of these organizations and the political-economic status of the respective countries. They take into consideration the two salient prerequisites of the freedom of the press, i.e. freedom of speech and freedom of information, intertwined with the ecological-political-economic environments. As the authors state, “Other variables, such as culture, are of interest but generally extend beyond the purview of this study”⁴. A number of other studies scrutinize national Codes of Ethics in search for universal principles and concepts, such as truthfulness of information, the prohibition of discrimination, fair means in gathering the information, integrity of the source and the journalist, and freedom of expression and comment⁵, only to

² H. G. Herscovitz, *Brazilian journalists’ perception of media roles, ethics and foreign influences on Brazilian journalism*, “Journalism Studies” 2004, No (1), p. 85.

³ See J. Piecowye, *Negotiating global and local journalism ethics: A case-study of how a local Dubai radio talk show covered the arrest of a couple for kissing in public*, “Journalism Studies” 2011, No 12(6), p. 816-825; L. Wilkins, B. Brennen, *Conflicted interests, contested terrain: journalism ethics codes then and now*, “Journalism Studies” 2004, Vol. 5, No 3, p. 297-309.

⁴ I. Himelboim, Y. Limor, *Media perception of freedom of the press: A comparative international analysis of 242 codes of ethics*, “Journalism” 2008, Vol. 9, Issue 3, p. 236.

⁵ T. Laitila, *Journalists Codes of Ethics in Europe*, “European Journal of Communication” 1995, No 10(4), p. 527-544; M. Perkins, *International law and the search for universal principles in journalism ethics*, “Journal of Mass Media Ethics” 2002, #17(3), p. 193-208.

state the tendency of professional codes of journalism toward universalization. Without questioning the legitimacy of these studies, I find it possible and necessary to give a more accurate verbalization of their conclusions – it is the vocabulary and rhetoric of the Codes of Ethics that are subjected to unification, not the content of the involved concepts, that are determined by the language of a particular Code and the type of culture where it functions.

It was D.H. Weaver⁶ and D. Berkowitz, Y. Limor and J. Singer⁷ who mentioned culture with respect to ethical standards in journalism. They stated that the professional ethics of journalists are largely determined by the national contexts within which they work, i.e. by culture. This assertion was approved by some further research on “perception of journalism’s institutional roles, epistemologies and ethical ideologies”, carried out by T. Hanitzsch et al. in 18 countries⁸. They came to the conclusion that, although impartiality, the reliability and factualness of information and adherence to universal ethical principles are similarly valued worldwide, their importance is perceived differently across countries. The authors point out to the existing difference in either adhering to general and universal ethical principles in some countries, and situational ethics in other countries. In real life it translates into a number of possible cultural bumps.

For instance, while covering a war criminal case, the reporters from a Russian TV channel would not follow the rule of no filming the members of the jury. Apparently, the safety of an individual was of little if any concern to them, compared to the desire to get the story. The concept of being responsible for privacy, personal safety and security of each and every member of the jury, who might be in danger after appearing on TV or elsewhere would not even cross the minds of the crew. The reason behind this type of misconduct lies deep in the collectivist culture of Russia, where a person is viewed only as a part of a group⁹.

⁶ D.H. Weaver, *Journalists around the World: Commonalities and differences*, [in:] *The Global Journalist: News people around the world*, ed. David H. Weaver, Cresskill, NJ: Hampton 1998, p. 455-480.

⁷ D. Berkowitz, Y. Limor, J. Singer, *A Cross-Cultural Look at Serving the Public Interest American and Israeli Journalists Consider Ethical Scenarios*, “Journalism” 2004, No 5(2), p. 159-181.

⁸ T. Hanitzsch, F. Hanusch, C. Mellado, M. Anikina, R. Berganza, I. Cangoz, E.K.W. Yuen, *Mapping journalism cultures across nations: A comparative study of 18 countries*, “Journalism Studies” 2011, No 12(3), p. 273-293.

⁹ The term ‘collectivist culture’ is borrowed from G. Hofstede (G. J. Hofstede, *Cultures and organizations: software of the mind*, New York 2005).

In intercultural communication terms, T. Hanitzsch et al. speak also of universalism and particularism¹⁰. Though avoiding questionable methods of reporting is one of the maxims of most codes of journalism ethics, the “situational” ethics allows for doing harm to some if the work benefits bigger groups of people¹¹. With the same token of disregard to feelings of an individual, it was next to impossible to make a journalist understand why it was inadmissible to interview three out of four musicians of a jazz-band on the grounds of race, as the reporter thought that African-American players were of more interest to the predominantly Caucasian public, than a Caucasian jazzman.

In his comparative study ‘Journalism Ethics Revised: A Comparison of Ethics Codes in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and Muslim Asia’, K. Hafez treats the texts of professional codes as *discourses*, and in so doing, shifts the attention from pure verbalization of ideas to their pragmatic value (revelation of social relations between the discourse actors): “Discourses on journalism ethics are complex processes involving actors formulating positions through references to actual or past interpretations of meaning. Ethical reasoning has a temporal dimension when relating to contemporary or past, to traditional or modern values, or, what makes the matter more complicated, to what the discourse participant holds and assumes to be imminent values of society (if he or she is not outright normative in approach). Social reality is a construct, and it is only through discourse itself, through intersubjective ways of agreeing, that we can feel on safer ground concerning our own perception of past or present values”¹². The study compares phrasings of basic ethical notions (tradition, religion, truth, objectivity, freedom, privacy, etc.) and makes a forward-looking review of individualistic vs. communitarian demeanour of a journalist as reflected in the national Codes of Journalistic Ethics. However, it does not come closer to making a comprehensive discourse analysis of a prototypical, shared by all representatives of a language culture, image of an ethically behaving journalist.

It is of little doubt that professional codes of ethics for journalism can serve as a source for reconstructing a model of journalist’s professional com-

¹⁰ For these terms see F. Trompenaars, C. Humpden-Turner, *Riding The Waves of Culture: Understanding Diversity in Global Business* (2nd edition). London: Nicholas Brealey 1997.

¹¹ T. Hanitzsch, F. Hanusch, C. Mellado, M. Anikina, R. Berganza, I. Cangoz, E.K.W. Yuen, *Mapping journalism cultures across nations: A comparative study of 18 countries*, “*Journalism Studies*” 2011, No 12(3), p. 284.

¹² K. Hafez, *Journalism Ethics Revised: A Comparison of Ethics Codes in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and Muslim Asia*, “*Political Communication*” 2002, No 19(2), p. 227-228.

municative personality, as they are initially called to prescribe the standard for competent practitioners. Since the codes are designed and formulated by professionals for their peers, the texts not only construct professional communicative context together with its actors, but also naturally reflect the existing context. Thus, an extensive analysis of the *discourse of ethical codes* is likely to disclose the *specifics* of the *professional picture of reality* in terms of the *objects* and *subjects* that make the professional field of a journalist, his/her desired ethical *activities* and *characteristics*, as well as *relations* and *interactions* with others. The exploration of a model journalist based on these discourse categories can give better understanding of actual activities that journalists perform in certain social contexts. Knowing such a culture-specific discourse portrait of a journalist can also significantly contribute to the theory and practice of teaching journalism majors, as it simultaneously provides the hints on the content and methods (genres and formats) of training.

Methodological frame of the research

The aim of this research is to reconstruct the portrait of a Belarusian professional journalist as it is reflected in the discourse of national official Code of Journalistic Ethics. It is believed to make a methodological ground for further improvement of already existing and designing new professional courses for university graduates in the country. Given the linguistic thrust of the university courses provided by the authors, it is also of interest and benefit to compare the discursively built identity of a Belarusian journalist and the ones representing the English language cultures. Hence, the sampling of the analysis is composed of the following texts: the Belarusian national official Code of Journalistic Ethics¹³, the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) Code of Ethics¹⁴, the UK National Union of Journalists (NUJ) Code of Conduct¹⁵, the Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ) Ethics Guidelines¹⁶ and the Australian Journalists' Association (AJA) Code of Ethics¹⁷.

This study is based on the philosophical assumptions of *linguistic relativism*, that structure of the language habitually used by people interferes with and determines the way individuals experience the world¹⁸, and *social*

¹³ Can be found at the official website of the Union: <http://bsj.by>

¹⁴ Can be found at the official website of the SPJ: <https://www.spj.org>

¹⁵ Can be found at the official website of the NUJ: <https://www.nuj.org.uk>

¹⁶ Can be found at the official website of the CAJ: <http://caj.ca>

¹⁷ Can be found at the official website of the AJA: <https://accountablejournalism.org>

¹⁸ See E. Sapir, *The Status of Linguistics as a Science*, "Language" 1929, Vol. 5, No.4, p. 207-214; B.L. Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1956.

constructivism, that individuals and groups construct their perceived social reality through different social discourses¹⁹. In accordance with these premises, there is a necessity to accept that, being discursive by nature, journalistic activity is aimed at creating and reflecting objective social reality, where the society makes a communication context for interaction of institutional and individual subjects, including professional journalists. Consequently, the picture of reality constructed by journalistic discourse reflects a current system of social roles, including the role of journalists; and it also mirrors the system of communicative roles within the journalistic discourse, i.e. the discourse addressed to other journalists.

Approaching the texts of professional ethics codes as discourse and seeing the object of the research – image of a journalist – as a discursive construct, the study follows the basic postulates of the *causal-genetic perspective to discourse analysis*²⁰ that states interrelation of two content layers in discourse – pragmatic content and thematic content, being called ‘discourse picture of actors interaction’ and ‘discourse picture of the world’ respectively. Pragmatic content can be described as made of semantic propositions that denote the subjects of discourse (both physical subjects, i.e. immediate addresser and addressee, and inscribed ones, constructed by discourse) and their relations, i.e. it is the situation of communication inscribed, directly and/or indirectly, into discourse. Thematic content deals with the ideas and gnoseological constructions about reality represented in discourse, that is the set of propositions comprising the immediate message of communication. Thus, to describe the model of a journalist’s professional personality means to reconstruct the pragmatic and thematic propositions of the codes’ discourse and examine their subjects (actants) in terms of the social status ascribed to them and the communicative roles that, being manifested in the language of the codes, reveal actual relations among peers within the professional field.

The procedure of discourse thematic propositions reconstruction constitutes a gradual analysis of what A. Mustajoki calls ‘simple semantic structures’ which represent “a naïve speaker’s impressions of the world”²¹. Using functional semantic analysis procedure, derived from the theory of language

¹⁹ See W. Leeds-Hurwitz, *Social construction of reality*, [in:] *Encyclopedia of communication theory*, Thousand Oaks, eds. Littlejohn S., Foss K., CA: SAGE Publications 2009, p. 892-895.

²⁰ I.F. Ukhvanova-Shmigova, *Kauzalno-geneticheskiy podkhod v kontekste lingvistiki diskursa*. Minsk: BGU 2014 [Ухванова-Шмыгова И.Ф., *Каузально-генетический подход в контексте лингвистики дискурса*. Минск: БГУ 2014].

²¹ A. Mustajoki, *From Meaning to Form: an Alternative Model of Functional Syntax*, “Russian Language Journal” 2007, No 57, p. 8.

actualization²², all the actants of discourse's semantic structures are being grouped into categories, each of them representing a separate subject of journalistic field referred to by the representatives of the group, and are further accompanied with the respective hyperonymic predicates, also reconstructed from the same set of semantic structures. Pragmatic propositions, whose actants are the actual communicants involved into discourse, gain their predicates via semantic analysis of what A. Mustajoki defines as 'obligatory modifier Speech function'. This element of a simple semantic structure is expressed, explicitly or implicitly, through metaverbs that denote the communicative intention of the inscribed addresser of discourse²³. For a detailed description and explanation of functional semantic analysis procedure see my monograph *Mediyniy dyskurs lobbirovaniya: opit analiza*²⁴.

The collection of thematic and pragmatic propositions from each national Code of Journalistic Ethics represents the respective prototypical professional communicative personality of a journalist. Further in the text the specifically linguistic reasoning is adapted to the aim of the article and the use of terminology of discourse analysis is reduced to the minimum so that to present the results in the form of grounded observations.

Belarusian vs. English-language model of a journalist's professional communicative personality

The Belarusian national Code of Journalistic Ethics was adopted by the Belarusian Union of Journalists in 1995 and represents a somewhat revised text of the USSR Professional Code of Ethics for Journalism adopted in 1991. The document is composed of Articles – no other code of ethics comprises such structural unit – and three chapters. Compared to its Soviet prototype, the Belarusian document contains fewer articles, the original ones titled “Honesty” and “Regard for the honour and dignity of the individual” are omitted. In addition to Chapter ‘Principles of professional ethics in journalism’, common for all the national codes in the sampling, the Belarusian document includes two more unique chapters, they are: “Violations of the professional code of conduct” and “Assignment of responsibility for professional misconduct”. Hence, it is already the composition of the Belar-

²² Yu.V. Popov, T.P. Tregubovich, *Tekst: struktura i semantika*. Minsk: Vich. shk. 1984 [Попов Ю.В., Трегубович Т.П., *Текст: структура и семантика*, Минск: Выш. Шк. 1984].

²³ A. Mustajoki, *From Meaning to Form: an Alternative Model of Functional Syntax*, “Russian Language Journal” 2007, No 57, p. 14.

²⁴ E.V. Savich, *Mediyniy dyskurs lobbirovaniya: opit analiza*, Minsk: BГУ 2012 [Савич Е.В., *Медийный дискурс лоббирования: опыт анализа*. Минск: БГУ 2012].

Belarusian code that discloses relations within journalistic professional field in the country. The dictatorial discourse of the document presupposes, in the first place, the strongly hierarchical structure of the professional community, with some subjects exercising power over others. Besides, the composition of the code, alongside with the title chosen for the constituent units (Article), precondition their being perceived as a mandatory law, rather than a recommended list of shared standards.

A subject of professional journalistic activity is called in the text of the Belarusian code “a journalist” and is not affiliated with any organization or community, as there is no direct address to a professional in the text. The functional addressee is indirectly expressed in the Preamble to the Code and seems to be inconsistent. On the one hand, there is a notice that “The provisions of this Code apply to the members of the Belarusian Union of Journalists, editorial staff of Belarusian mass media, and the individuals practicing journalism on behalf of media outlets or due to other legal grounds”; on the other hand, the document states that “This Code acts as a regulation handbook to judge the cases of professional misconduct”. It is, though, only the Committee for Professional Ethics, elected at the Congress of the Belarusian Union of Journalists, who has the right to adjudicate the issues of ethical norms violation. Such split addressee and functional ambivalence of the Belarusian code (it resembles a kind of semi-Criminal Code) is working against, rather than stimulates, the development of collegial unity and professional community of journalists in the country.

Unlike in the Belarusian code, corporate spirit of ethical standards for journalism is manifested in all the English-language codes. To introduce each principle of ethical conduct, the Canadian Association of Journalists uses the active voice predication with the pronoun ‘we’ (“We are disciplined...”; “We avoid stereotypes...”; etc.) that stands for all Canadian journalists without any specification against their experience in the field (“This document – along with the accompanying “Principles for Ethical Journalism” – is intended to help both seasoned professionals and new journalists to hold themselves accountable for professional work”). The Society of Professional Journalists makes the collective subject ‘members of the Society’ to be both the source of their Code’s message (“Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe...”) and its receiver; the latter, in turn, is inscribed into another collective referent ‘journalists’, defined as “all people in all media” (“The Society declares... and encourages their use in its practice by all people in all media”; “Journalists should...”). The Australian Journalists’ Association while addressing its individual member still emphasizes that they are “bound by the rules of the Association” to observe its Code of Ethics in their employment. Even the UK National Union of Journalists, despite being in full com-

pliance with the major principle of the British culture to guarantee privacy and, therefore, addressing its Code to 'a journalist', associates this single individual professional with the Union, the community of journalists, and with the public ("All journalists joining the NUJ have to sign up and agree"; "We encourage people to read and support the code of conduct and we ask members to promote it in the media industry").

The social context of a journalist in all the national codes is represented by numerous subjects, such as sources, colleagues, members of the public, juveniles, victims of sex crimes, government, advertisers, sponsors, organisations, media themselves, etc. It is not so much the cortege of professionals that distinguishes between their discursive portraits as it is the semantic type of predication that defines journalists' social roles in relation to others.

The discourse of the Belarusian document depicts a journalist as being *responsible* to "the readers, listeners, and the constitutional institutions of the society» and *obliged* "to ensure the citizens' right to information", "provide truthful reflection of reality by giving exhaustive information", "to maintain the confidentiality of a source of information, respect the right to intellectual property, hold copyright and avoid plagiarism", as well as "to refuse to implement the editor's instructions if they do not comply with public morals or the provisions of this Code". The choice of such descriptive modality (predicates do not contain proper verbs, but only 'modal adjective + Infinitive' constructions) fails to ascribe a professional subject with any activity, but characterises him/her as a passive obligator. This social role of a journalist is confirmed in the course of further analysis, as other duties of a journalist are verbalised through special syntactic constructions and a present simple form of verbs which together have the general meaning of 'help'. As a result, this discursively constructed professional performs not as a main agent of activity, but as a secondary assistant: "a journalist helps the mass media to objectively reflect the plurality of opinions", "with his work, a journalist helps to prevent ignorance, unawareness, misunderstanding and tension between the nations, encourages the society to develop a culture of inter-ethnic relations", "assists the colleagues in developing their creativity, knowledge and professional skills, takes care of the colleagues when they are in trouble". There are no propositions in the discourse of the Belarusian code of journalistic ethics with a predicate expressed in strong verbs of action.

The English-language codes, namely American and Australian, also employ modality as a main specifier of the predicates of thematic propositions. However, the semantics of modality is formed predominantly by means of the modal verbs followed by the Infinitive of a full active verb: "Each member [...] is bound [...] to observe this Code of Ethics in his employment: 1. to report and interpret news with a scrupulous honesty"; "Journalists should

respond quickly to questions about accuracy, clarity and fairness”, etc. In the Canadian and British codes of conduct all the predicates are only full verbs in Present Simple active: “We publish or broadcast all corrections, clarifications or apologies in a consistent way”, “A journalist differentiates between fact and opinion”, etc. As for the semantic predicate denoting relations of a journalist to the others, in these codes it is the metaverb “to serve”: “should recognize a special obligation to serve as watchdogs over public affairs and government”, “should diligently seek subjects of news coverage to allow them to respond to criticism or allegations of wrongdoing”, “When we contact them [victims of crime], we are sensitive to their situations, and report only information in which the public has a legitimate interest”, etc.

Interestingly, the codes of English-speaking countries do not emphasise any personal characteristic of a journalist, the only attribute directly attached to the noun denoting the professional sphere of journalists’ activity can be met in the SPJ Code – “ethical journalism”; all other characteristics expressed in the discourse of these codes refer to the activity the journalists perform, e.g. “we are careful to distinguish between assertions and fact”, “to interpret news with a scrupulous honesty”, “Journalists should be honest and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information”, and so on. In the Belarusian code, by contrast, certain personal characteristics of a journalist are shown as vital for his proper professional performance. What is more, the discourse treats these characteristics as self-acting agents who limit journalists in the choice of possible behaviours and control their allegedly natural striving for misdemeanour: “Conscientiousness of a journalist calls for scrupulous fact-checking; it excludes fabrication of facts, concocting materials and using unsubstantiated statements”, “Professional honesty prohibits a journalist to benefit from his/her professional position”.

The above observations, based on the thorough linguistic analysis of professional journalistic discourse, make it possible to derive the discursive portrait of a Belarusian journalist and compare it to a generalized professional communicative personality of a journalist from the English-speaking countries.

Compared to journalists of English-speaking countries, who are strongly affiliated with their organization and professional community, Belarusian journalists are discursively positioned as individual subjects whose communication with the professional community is not equal. While the American, Australian, British and Canadian journalists naturally hold themselves accountable for professional work because ethical demeanour makes them competitive among peers, their Belarusian colleagues are forced to perform properly under the risk of being otherwise punished by the authoritative

bodies. In accord with the mission of their profession to serve public interests and democratic rights, foreign journalists collectively elaborate and share guidelines for thorough implementation of the commitments. Belarusian professionals, in turn, are assigned general obligation to different social agents without any clear requirements for particular professional activities but the one to assist others, especially colleagues. In fact, these are the other agents who actually are responsible for being well-informed, which is originally meant to be journalists' work outcome. Foreign professionals define the characteristics and communicate clear criteria for ethical behaviour, while Belarusian journalistic community are more focused on personal features of an individual that are made responsible for regulation of his/her professional demeanour.

It is worth noticing that the essence of a journalist's work – to provide citizens with reliable information – is kept the same in all the national Codes of conduct for journalists. It is exactly the prescribed, and thus expected, way of communicative behaviour of a specialist that makes a significant difference and helps understand the disagreement in actual professional performance of journalists around the globe. As the analysis of the codes' discourse shows, the object of the English-speaking journalists' activity is information. So, to fulfil their social duty they use definite techniques to ethically collect, process and disseminate it in a most neutral and disengaged manner. In case of the Belarusian journalists' discourse, the object of their work is the public, information is just a means to maintain social relations and keep the place in the professional hierarchy. Therefore, it is very unlikely for the Belarusian journalists to provoke public outcry, but it is, at the same time, of more probability that emotionally-coloured opinion would dominate neutral news genre. In the English-speaking community, to be a journalist means to carry out the social contract by performing specific, but in no case less or more valuable, activities and meeting the expected standards. With such an approach to treating the profession, communication between all the social actors is organised on the equal basis, which means that the trends in the profession, content and form of journalistic products, depend totally upon the feedback from the public. The Belarusian professional journalistic discourse reflects and constructs the reality in which to be a journalist means to be a person with distinct and distinctive characteristics, who is involved in special relations with the rest of the society – is always subordinate to others, taking the role of either an obligator, assistant or potential perpetrator. Thus, the interaction between social actors in this situation cannot presuppose communication on equal grounds; the trends in the sphere are also regulated on

the basis of feedback, but are tailored to the order of the more authoritative social subject.

This analysis fully explains the behaviour shown by the Belarusian journalists who worked for State Mass Media during the conflict in 2020. Such professional value as “assisting higher authorities” came into conflict with the universal human values (freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of access to information) that the protestants defended. Inability to shake the long-standing traditions of thoughtless subordination to authorities, habitual diminishing of a journalist’s professional self, and normalized lack of professional procedures undermined the Belarusian society – caused its split pitting State institutions and their supporters against the civil society.

Discussion and implications for professional training of journalists

The above analysis represents just another illustration for the already proven fact that professional culture absorbs the national culture and reflects it in the professional discourse. What I intended to prove though, is the inference that professional journalistic discourse, alongside with the globally universal picture of professional reality, transmits and cultivates also a culture-specific image of a peer professional, as well as programs the relations and communicative behaviour of a journalist. It is due to the certain discursively generated communicative personality of a specialist that the professional performance of journalists differs. And it is of no wonder, that pure following the letter of the professional standards, elaborated for the professional community in one country, does not give positive result and usually meets severe criticism. The concept of professionalism in journalism, thus, incorporates not only the presumably universal knowledge of the basics of ethical conduct, but also the understanding of culturally-sensitive professional communication models. This integrative comprehension of professionalism should be adopted by the University curricula.

Modern understanding of education supports inter- and multi-disciplinarity, and this provides better grounds for a rounded education of competent journalists through training effective professional communicative individuals. Linguists, communication specialists and interculturalists should play a major part in the process as they have the necessary information and tools to present and practice effective ethical professional communication approaches, as well as stimulate production of culturally adequate texts/discourses.

Referring to the author’s personal experience of teaching at the Faculty of Journalism, Belarusian State University, formation and development of

a journalist's professional communicative personality may be integrated into the curriculum for journalism education through a complex of academic disciplines/courses varying in their content and focus (theoretical vs. practical). An all-comprehensive competency-based guidance for proper professional communication is supposed to combine the journalism-centred disciplines with:

- a course of foreign language for specific purposes, that contributes to the development of students' professional identities by providing and emphasizing both culturally specific knowledge and culturally sensitive communication skills;
- a course in intercultural communication to cover the very basics of the reasons why people in different cultures value and prioritize different things (i.e. beliefs and values) and to show how these values are manifested in verbal and non-verbal behaviours in organizing professional journalistic discourse;
- a course in working with different target groups that provides practice in analysis and production of texts designed for different audiences, in distinguishing and understanding differences in the use of verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal codes of communication in written, spoken and video messages;
- a course that teaches critical approach to professional journalistic discursive practices and develops students' discursive competence so that they are able to use professional terminology and language tools in accordance with the requirements of a particular communicative situation; the focus here is on equipping undergraduates with a strong analytical base for gathering and processing qualitative data so that they are able to use these skills for undertaking their own research (similar to the one presented in the article) in an unexpected or unclear situation and then accordingly correct their communicative strategy; it should pay special attention to cultural variations of treating ethical professional behaviour and acquaint future journalists with the idea of their professional communicative personality.

The reasons for introducing the above complex of courses are twofold. First, they form cultural and ethical awareness of the graduates, gradually develop in them sensitivity to cultural diversity and train the skills of ethical cross-cultural communication. But, above all, they educate future professionals to respect their own culture and values, just as others, and accept the uniqueness of professional communicative styles without immediate labelling them as good or bad, ethical or unethical ones.

Conclusion

Professional competence of a journalist is only conceivable in case of proper formation and sufficient development of a specialist's communicative personality. Being a product of culture, this personality is reflected and enshrined in the Code of professional ethics. Being set in the Code of professional conduct, certain professional values and their interpretations become an inseparable part of vocational training curricula, making those who are taught in accordance with them hostages of such interpretations. The situation with the Belarusian journalistic community in 2020 serves as an unfortunate example of how cultivation of professional behavioural patterns basing on certain values may contribute to a public and political crisis due to the conflict between journalists' professional values and universal human values. To prevent the recurrence of this kind of situations, it is necessary to reassess the whole approach to teaching professional journalists. It is of importance to build on sensitivity to the social contexts, both domestic and international, and critical thinking for prioritizing values when applying the rules of professional journalistic conduct in a particular situation.

National codes of professional conduct for journalists reveal different, culturally specific, sets of characteristics, activities and skills that make a good specialist; these sets vary even for the countries of one language. The ability to recognise the model of professional interaction of a different culture, as well as the capacity to ethically adjust one's communication behaviour in accordance with it, indicates a journalist's excellence and professionalism.

Integration into the society is always connected with constant change of roles (social and communicative) and mimicry of meanings. If a specialist possesses special knowledge, is equipped with analytical tools and is trained to communicate cross-disciplinary and cross-culturally, he/she can arbitrarily construct the desired social reality in any situation of professional communication.

This unique professional communicative personality, capable of adapting to circumstances and, vice versa, changing them, creates an advantage in the labour market for every graduating journalist and seasoned professional. Therefore, Universities should integrate the concept of ethical and culturally competent professional communicative personality into their curricula, making it a cross-cutting category and collateral object of every discipline.

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