
CAN MEDIA LANGUAGE LIE?

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Abstract

The paper deals with the different dimensions of fact and fiction when using the media language and describes what is going on with the language when the truth changes into a lie. The bases for reflection are the basic psycholinguistic and semantic-pragmatic principles and theories that highlight the context as the current relationship framework guaranteeing the revelation of the meaning of the expression.

Keywords: media language, context, metaphor, quality, irony

1. Introduction

The principles of culture discourse such as clarity, accuracy, cogency, proportionality, logic, content, and lucidity are not the priority anymore. In order to impress, influence, persuade, elicit emotions, the expression in the media dominates over the topic, and the expected effect of the transmitted information strongly influences the creation of media notice. Media products perceived by consumers are repeated and various *pragmatic discourses* [1] (editorial, agency, professional, political, journalistic), based on the purposeful search for appropriate means to achieve the goals, are regrouped in them.

In this context, the concept of *catch all* [2] is used – an attempt to win the favour of everyone. The mortals are drawn into their power by intentions that lie outside of the text. Language phenomena that signal these expressive tendencies are easily transferred to the extra-media sphere. Therefore, not only the user of the expression is important, but also their interpreter, who has the knowledge of the language behaviour preferences of the media, can predict promises, influence, irony and possible deception. Irrespective of the strength of the language indication, the context plays a decisive role in interpreting the real meaning, not the language form, because it can be arbitrary.

2. The truth about lying and a lie as part of communication

A man can naturally lie. The everydayness of lying is shown in politics, family, advertising and marriage. One person tells about 700 lies per year, with

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the dimensions of lies varying. The reason may be your own profit or someone else's, averting inconveniences, denying feelings, covering one's tracks, an effort to be funny or people lie without having a reason. A lie runs a defensive mechanism. Using *confabrications*, false lies, a person distorts the situation, and inaccurately distinguishes reality from fantasy when their recognition is inadequate. The *real lie* can only be taken into consideration in school-age children because they are able to distinguish the truth from lies and learn that they must not deceive. The real liars lack a moral dilemma; they act intentionally, flexibly distort reality, profit from the situation and get power over it. Sophisticated lies can tactically 'bend' the truth or twist the lie so that it becomes true. The liar of liars was so unwillingly the cyclist Lance Armstrong, who admitted using doping. His speech was strikingly perfect, and he did not convey the sceptics with his description of the truth.

Creating any misinformation is a challenging cognitive activity that requires anticipating the addressee's response and, if necessary, denying, denying, denying. On the other hand, reliably, even without psycho-diagnostic methods, determining indicators of lying is not easy. Unless nonverbal means or vague language indicators allow us, in the worst case the lie detector, we rely on our own knowledge of the truth (mental register). Such as in situations with unnecessary gifts, in which our life is facilitated by a *white lie*. Quasi courtesy compliments are less distressing than the unpleasant truth. However, tightrope of unlimited praise often conceals the pretence leading in social influence and emotional manipulation.

2.1. Even lying nicely is a sin

Manipulative techniques belong to the area of *forbidden rhetoric* [3]. G. Beck has produced an overview of purposefully used manipulative techniques, the purpose of which is to lie, deceive, divert someone's attention, express power, impress, control someone, etc. The author sees the importance of a lie "in the abuse of trust in the sincerity of man" [4], but paradoxically she offers guidance on how to do it.

1. Selection of a suitable target group - in addition to professional revellers of lies (judges, cops, Advertisement Council, Broadcasting and Retransmission Council, linguistic institutes, etc.);
2. Adhering to the basic principles – to imitate, not to exaggerate, not to be noticeable, to relax, not to contradict yourself, to deny;
3. To defend yourself in attempts to be revealed – to pretend a real experience, to pretend cognitive weakness, to pretend pressure [4, p. 154-165].

The most obvious way of media lie is the concealed persuasion method, which presents the alleged truth about reality. "In a concealed persuasion, manipulators use vague, multi-meaning concepts, while the reader thinks they are exact terms. The only possible defence of the reader is to confront published arguments with others and to create their own opinion based on the comparison of individual facts. " [5] Another example is putting the naming into *quotes* or

using the popular words *so called*, with which the media offer the meaning they wish.

“If the author of the text for some reason has the ambition to draw up a misleading text or at least a heading, they must have the potential to recognize different shifts in meaning of words that can influence the audience with the aids of language. “ [6] The media come along with offering a presumption as a reality thanks to delusional, misleading, deceptive, masking, provoking, intruding and ironizing headings [7]. Stating without reasons that *Hedviga isn't lying (Hedviga neklame)* [<https://www.tyzden.sk/casopis/13039/psychiatri-hedviga-neklame/>] or that *The doctors are on strike again (Lekári opät' štrajkujú)* [<https://www.e-obce.sk/clanky/1419.html>], when they are just in strike readiness, is as common as sharing hoaxes with a photo of non-existing *Refugees on train (Utečencov vo vlaku)* [<https://dennikn.sk/718059/prirucka-pre-stredne-skoly-klamstva-a-konspiracie/>] and reading a status in which *Lasica warns against Islam (Lasica varuje pred islamom)* [<https://dennikn.sk/718059/prirucka-pre-stredne-skoly-klamstva-a-konspiracie/>] or an unheard-of father provokes with an experience that *Gypsies don't pay for medicine (Rómovia neplatia za lieky)* [<https://dennikn.sk/718059/prirucka-pre-stredne-skoly-klamstva-a-konspiracie/>].

Communication goals, social conventions and courtesy encourage media communicators to use *hedging* techniques to reduce disapproval or minimize negative ratings. Although hedging is considered a limitation (inhibition) of a communication intention, it is a short-lived lie that is often used in media for ironic goals (*I hate to say it, but vote! – Nerád to hovorím, ale chod' voliť!* [<https://www.facebook.com/AbeH16/posts/1010679802323576>], *Harabin is right – but he has his own truth – Harabin má pravdu – ale svoju* [<https://domov.sme.sk/c/7930686/harabin-ma-pravdu-ale-svoju.html>], *Slovakia got back into the Groove, says Blaha. And he is slightly right. – Slovensko sa vrátilo do starých kolají, hovorí Blaha. A trochu má pravdu.* [dennikn.sk/1076292/slovensko-sa-vratilo-do-starych-kolaji-hovori-blaha-a-trochu-ma-pravdu/], *Matovič is right, but the hassle in the Slovak parliament makes people just annoyed – Matovič má pravdu, ale natahovačky v NR SR ľudí iba rozčulujú* [<https://www.tyzden.sk/nazory/37187/matovic-ma-pravdu-ale-natahovacky-v-nr-sr-ludi-iba-rozculuju/>]).

2.2. Lie has short legs

This old wisdom, as well as many other, modern statements like *the incident did (not) happen (skutok sa (ne)stal)* flirt with the truth. A lie contradicts the general principles of culture and cultivation, therefore a cultivated spoken expression must, irrespective of its content-thematic focus, satisfy the basic requirement of the truthfulness [8]. In terms of communication interaction, *conversational maxims* [9], which are based on the truthfulness, adequate information saturation, relevance and clarity of the mediated information help to reveal the real meanings [10]. Violation and adherence to these maxims may not always be judged on the axis appropriate and

inappropriate language because it belongs to the typical features of a media presentation. However, if we look at the coherence of the text and expect functional consistency of verbal and nonverbal expression, it is more than certain that the following questioning can objectively draw out the details revealing a lie.

Maxim of quality – Are the statements truthful? Is there enough evidence to make certain statements? Do I consider the statement truthful? Is my awareness of the topic sufficient? Is the source of my awareness trustful?

Maxim of quantity – Are the statements informative enough? Are they adequately long? Is there enough generalization? Is repetition in the statement functional? Is the amount of communicated information legitimate?

Maxim of relevance – Are the statements relevant and up-to-date? Are the statements in relation to the recipient's expectation? Are important facts unspoken? Is there any fabrication? Are the statements evasive?

Maxim of concept – Are the statements clear and brief? Do the statements have adequate linguistic-composition structure and content-thematic realization? Does the pronunciation correspond to the communication situation? Are the statements ambiguous? Does the non-verbal communication oppose the verbal communication? [9]

Obvious and wilful violation of the maxim of quantity in current media products is an impulse for violating other requirements and it shows the communication goal not to give relevant information. Much or little information given by the speakers does not concern the given topic, that is, also the way, in which the information is presented, confirms that what is said does not necessarily have to be the truth. Behind each of these beliefs there are our interpretation activities – inferences.

1. If the media statement includes a little information, we imply that the communicant wants to hide something.
2. If the media statement includes a lot of information, we imply that the communicant wants to buy some time artificially.
3. If the media statement includes redundant information, we imply that the communicant tends to avoid.
4. If the media statement includes some ambiguities, we imply that the communicant wants to haze the truth.
5. If the media statement includes some falsehood, we imply that the communicant wants to lie and manipulate [11].

2.3. *The effect of illusory truth*

The media likes to persuade us about *ostriches burying head into sand*. In the figurative meaning it is a day-to-day manipulation we do not even notice. The more often we hear the information, the less we are interested in its truthfulness. The ostrich, first of all, deceives us optically when its small head (compared to the rest of the body) bends down to take some stones needed to digest food. It is *a thousand times repeated lie, which becomes the truth*, even

though this statement does not come from the mouth of the German Nazi politician Joseph Goebbels. Many media users do not even know that, for example, using media hybrid, *have a nice evening (majte pekný večer)* the presenters are lying about our mother tongue because they abuse the frequent privilege of forming the linguistic custom. However, if they do not do it intentionally, what can be considered even worse, they do not lie.

O. Horák from Denník N states in his article *Stokrát opakovanému klamstvu skutočne uveríme* (A thousand time repeated lie becomes believable), that “populists and demagogues have a human mind inclined to their side“ [O. Horák, *Stokrát opakovanému klamstvu skutočne uveríme*, online at <https://dennikn.sk/249003/stokrat-opakovana-loz-sa-stava-pravdou/>]. It is a phenomenon of the illusory truth which was named in the 1970s and today it is often used by marketing. It is basically a perfect lie which has changed into the truth [4, p. 155]. We can avoid the effect of this trap by following the rule *trust but verify*.

3. Advertisement, don't lie to me!

The basis of the word *reklama* (advertising) can be found in Latin. The primary meaning of the Latin adverb *clam* is *secretly, covertly*. With the same orthographic form it works in English for example as a noun (a clam – figuratively a bashful person) and a verb with the meaning *to suddenly stop talking in order to keep a secret or because of being shy*. However, the lie leaps to the eye, especially if a loudmouth, lat. *clāmātor*, often makes themselves heard and with a cry resists, lat. *reclāmō*, just to catch attention or to reach some goal. The Slovak language dictionary defines the advertisement as public recommendation, offering and praising something or someone, and in this sense it came to us from French. The French phrase *réclamer bruyamment*, i.e. upbraid, to express something loudly, refers to exaggerated public boasting.

The convincing process by which advertising searches for consumers of certain products or services through the media is motivated by profit. Advertisement has no conscience, no redness, no eyes to avert, it does not start sweating or scratching nose, when it has something up its sleeve. What are the odds that the cheapest washing machine is in fact the most expensive and the most advantageous loans actually have the highest expenses? We have experiences with subliminal perceptions when drinking beverages full of fruit and we do not know that in fact they are concentrates. It uses suggestive questions (*Do you want to survive a serious accident? - Chcete prežiť vážnu nehodu?* [<https://www.autoweb.cz/novinky-aktuality-zpravodajstvichcete-prezit-vaznou-nehodut-kupte-si-bile-auto11569/?comments>]), *Do you want to have healthy teeth? – Chcete mať zdravé zuby?* [<https://www.elixi.sk/curaprox-white-is-black-set-bieliaca-zubna-pasta-90-ml-p48369/>]) and the essential part of its message is stated in imperatives (*Buy a white car! - Kúpte si biele auto!* [<https://www.autoweb.cz/novinky-aktuality-zpravodajstvichcete-prezit-vaznou-nehodut-kupte-si-bile-auto11569/?comments>]), *Try a black whitening paste!* -

Vyskúšajte čiernu bieliacu pastu! [<https://www.elixi.sk/curaprox-white-is-black-set-bieliaca-zubna-pasta-90-ml-p48369/>]. An advertisement is a stressor, which foists apparently meaningful messages – pseudo discourses [12], which, in fact, just talk people in believing that it is a bargain based on comparison of prices.

H. Srpová describes several types of strategies that were used by advertisement without taking into consideration the century for strengthening the persuasion. Besides the strategy: 1) *celebrity*, 2) *beauty*, 3) *something free*, 4) *products required also abroad or of foreign origin*, 5) *experts and their researches*, 6) *traditional products* the advertisements for products and services induce for decades, 7) *worries* about life, family, child [13]. These are miraculous products which sell themselves. You just have to have a single non-binding phone call, try an original Swiss product, after which you will not jump like a chamois, but you will become, fortunately, a doubting Thomas.

4. The defence of language

Omnis homo mendax – everybody lies [14]. We lie with or without words. Majority of the lies in the media are sentences. The meaning of a media statement can be distorted with the aids of quotations, links to other sources, foreign expressions, suggestive comparisons or metaphors. Since, typical of media statement is the so called polyphony [15] which often makes the components of several discourses carried out by natural language vague and ambivalent. However, this does not mean that they are lies or that the one who makes them is a liar. By pronouncing the statement *I will kill you!* (*Ja ťa zabijem!*) we aren't saying the truth, but we are also not lying. If we aren't aware of not telling the truth because of being wrong, we aren't lying as well. The liar is the one who lies knowingly and purposefully and a lie remains a lie even if no one reveals it. In this case we can talk about the way of rhetoric or media manipulation.

Figurative indirect naming generally follows some stylistic goals, the most resonating of which is the aim to hyperbolize. This is how the author of the headline revelled in license payers when he named it *Pocisková a Mikulčík: Moskvu im zacakáme všetci* (*Pocisková and Mikulčík: We all will shell out for Moscow for them*) [<https://www.cas.sk/fotogaleria/110775/pociskova-a-mikulcik-moskvu-im-zacakame-vsetci/8/>]. When observing these means a question arises, whether the requirement for quality of the discourse is really violated, whether the language of metaphor and comparison is really able to lie or their user is the one lying. Inspirational in this respect is H. Weinrich's view, which is based on the fact that "there is no lie in the metaphors, and we do not deceive anyone when we speak figuratively" [16]. A metaphor just disappoints our expectations for a short time [16, p. 47]. It follows that using a figurative naming *Maďar s menom po džine chce krajinu liečiť z opice* (*A Hungarian with a name of gin wants to cure the country from hangover*) [<https://spravy.pravda.sk/svet/clanok/228129-madar-s-menom-po-dzine-chce-krajinu-liecit-z-opice/>] doesn't violate the requirement for quality, because the context in which the

metaphor is used guarantees revealing of the meaning and we will not imagine a drunk country.

There is no doubt that there are some words, which were used to deceive and currently they are misleading. The words *svetonázor*, *demokracia*, *zdravý životný štýl* (*world-view*, *democracy*, and *healthy lifestyle*) can be proven liars. Although these words don't tell the truth, they paradoxically have high value in the ideology (of the media). A man who uses them not only lies, but also becomes a victim of the lie [16, p. 35].

Language is being destroyed by real lies, but the „truth that's told with bad intent beats all the lies you can invent“ (William Blake). Each word, abstract and concrete can dash someone's hopes and lie, when we knowingly free it from isolation and let it live [16, p. 48]. Language itself is innocent.

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