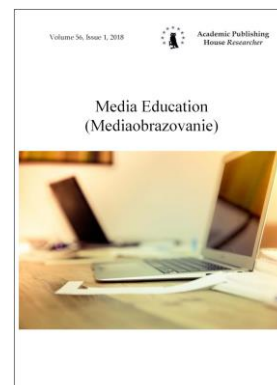


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Film genre and contents presupposition: the influence of the title and trailer

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Abstract

The article researches the influence of the original English film title to forming the genre and contents presuppositions of the viewers. It's very important for studying the process of choice of the film to view from the cognitive, translation, advertising, commercial perspectives. The empirical research with Russian-speaking recipients was conducted which aimed at investigating the process of creating the presuppositions to genre and contents of the film only perceiving and translating the title of the film and then the process of correcting the opinions after watching the trailer of the film. Understanding the title faces some barriers connected as the research shows with the direct literal interpretation of the title which happens due to several factors: lack of linguistic and cultural background by the viewers belonging to another culture and due to failure of the original title because of its inadequateness, ambiguity or inexpressiveness. These barriers are fully or partly leveled by the trailer. The sufficient level of destroying misunderstanding depends on the linear development of the trailer plot and enhancing the wish to view the film is supported by a complex parallel and spiral development of plot lines in a trailer.

Keywords: film title, title functions, title translation, presupposition, film genre, film contents, trailer

1. Introduction

Specificity of the perceived by the individual information depends on the row of factors among which there are the type of information; the persons who transfer and get information; the language and code of information etc. In a case when information is transferred in a form of a film the problem becomes deeper since the film represents the artistic audiovisual work which is “*a fundamentally new complex of optical, acoustic and kinetic sensations and in the conditions of transmedia, constantly improving the poetics and its expression potential and broadens its perimeter of receptive-media impact*” (Tsvetkova, 2017: 127).

Film as a complex media multimodal representation of the world is the object of a certain linguistic and cultural environment and while being transferred to a representative of another linguistic and cultural environment it may be distorted or misinterpreted. Thus we face a number of barriers hindering the adequate understanding of the transferred content of the message.

The barriers are provided by not enough knowledge of the film language and culture and by the means of the information transference which may be verbal, non-verbal and mixed, comprising both kinds. The process of getting the information is not a final stage in the interaction of two

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different cultural environments. The received message should be decoded and reacted by the recipient; and the correct decoding is influenced by the means representing this information.

2. Material and methods

The research aims at the revealing the role of a title of the film in the process of content presuppositions and the change of the last due to visualization through the trailer and their impact on the recipients' perception of the film idea in the process of interaction of textual and audiovisual types of information. We consider the film as information transferred by an English-speaking representative to a Russian-speaking recipient and a title and a trailer as means of getting this information.

The main methods of research are the questioning, semantic and contextual analysis, translation transformations analysis.

3. Discussion

The texts produced in one culture show to the individual belonging to another culture the picture of the world characteristic to this culture helping to acquire some knowledge of national mentality adaptation. One of the forms of representing the national mentality is cinema art as films reflect specific features of popular mentality and national picture of the world. J. Silbey presents a film as «individual, institutional and cultural memory» (Silbey, 2014: 24), placing it squarely within the realm of contestability. The viewers correlate the knowledge, values and subjective mental spaces, while perceiving the content of the film with preferable reliance on their own system of cultural coordinates. In E. Semino's opinion, from a cognitive point of view, text worlds can be seen as resulting from the application of certain portions of the recipient's background knowledge (schemata) to the interpretation of texts. The person's perception of a particular text world will depend on «the extent to which his or her existing schemata are confirmed or challenged during the process of interpretation» (Semino, 1995). In W. Lippmann's opinion the problem of reception of the other hasn't been solved till nowadays as there is a tendency to interpret something alien from one's own attitude and stereotypes. The stereotypization being the need of our own culture may lead to the deformation of the other (Lippmann, 1921). But our own and the other are in dialectical unity, so the other forms something like a screen in which everything which is inherent to us is reflected (Leinen, 2007: 138).

The cultural transposition is based on macro- and micro-structural units. By V.S. Vinogradov, the macro-structural elements in verbal and image information include implicit pragmatic presuppositions, communicative situation and implications (or subtext) which contain intertextual components (allusions, symbols, puns) or additional hidden content deliberately laid by the author into the text (Vinogradov, 2004: 19). This information may be represented in the meanings of lexical units and idioms or otherwise be included through allusions and hints to some historical or cultural facts.

As the film text concerns, the macro-structural components are the textual and image peculiarities typical for the culture transferring fragments of valuable experience and culturally significant information (Fedorova, 2009: 143).

Micro-cultural components inherent to the film contents are numerous: specific realities often contradicting common views of cultural and language subject and possessing ethnocultural uniqueness (Fedorova, 2009: 144), archetypal content (Noakk, Znamenskaya, 2014) which stimulates the interest of the recipients to the cinematographic production and others categories of a person, event, object, space etc (Babenko et al., 2005) and others. One of them is the title of the film. The film title fulfills many functions the main of which is to identify the film among a lot of others in the media space by defining its semantics and author's intention. According to O.Yu. Bogdanova, it's the title that creates an idea of the text as it's «a meaningful knot, completing the chain of successive links» (Bogdanova, 2009: 14).

A. Veleva-Borissov indicates several film title functions: nominative, identifying, anticipative, appellative and informative, proving the fact that the title begins its life long before the film starts to go on stimulating the imagination and represents the quintessence of its image-sense (Veleva-Borissov, 1993). F.M. Yarmuhamedova highlights the following functions of the film title: nominative, informative, sense-forming, stylistic, or attractive, and mnemonic (Yarmuhamedova, 2014: 266).

M. Eronnen and M. Rodi-Risberg, basing on Ch. Nord's classification of title functions, who differentiates between essential and optional sets (Nord, 1995), point out that the naming, informative and phatic functions are performed by each and every title for the very fact that it exists and is used in a communicative situation: every title is the name of a cultural product; every title informs about the existence of a cultural product bearing that name; every title establishes a contact with the potential user (reader, viewer etc.) (Eronnen, Rodi-Risberg, 2013). S. Pena-Cervel, also dividing all film titles' functions on essential and optional sets, pays attention to pragmatic and commercial factors in their functioning as the film titles signal to attention of the viewers and enhance the commercial attractiveness of the film (Pena-Cervel, 2016: 306). It happens due to the fact that an interesting title stimulates the audience's desire for viewing and hooks audience's attention.

A title may allude to other texts or other titles: it may therefore perform an intertextual and/or an intertitular function (Hoek, 1981). As it is pointed out by Ch. Nord, "like other texts, titles form part of the text corpus of a culture community with which they are linked by intertextual relations: they quote other texts (and titles), and are quoted in turn" (Nord, 1995: 281), e.g. Agatha Christie's *Hickory Dickory Dock* is a title taken from a nursery rhyme, and Joyce's *Ulysses* alludes to Homer's *Odyssey*.

L.V. Ukhova and Y.M. Chernitsina underline the role of advertising function of the film title and after the research have exposed that 42 % of viewers choose the film to watch by intriguing title (Ukhova, Chernitsina, 2015: 105). The question arises in which way the original film title is interpreted by the viewers of another culture and how their presuppositions of genre and content are formed and what role the trailer plays in correcting these presuppositions.

4. Results

To investigate the content presuppositions and the genre expectations of the recipients after introduction to the film title only and successively after the viewing the trailer the survey was conducted. The viewers were suggested a questionnaire containing seven columns: the title of the film in English which they haven't seen, the variant of its translation, content presuppositions and genre expectations before viewing the trailer and the variant of its translation, content presuppositions and genre expectations after viewing the trailer. The viewers used dictionaries - *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* and *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English for Advanced Learners* - for the translation of the original film titles. The two stages of the experiment (the first stage – translation and interpretation of the film title and the second stage – viewing the trailers from the sight www.youtube.com, giving changed variants of the title translation if any and genre establishing) lasted for 3 hours. 100 Russian recipients, aged from 18 to 30, with equal ratio of men and women, took part in the experiment producing their opinions on 40 titles and film trailers which they haven't yet been acquainted with.

After analyzing the answers to questionnaires it is obvious that a lot of presuppositions about a film basing on the title only highly depend on the direct meanings of the words comprised.

The difficulties may arise from 1) *the lack of linguistic-cultural knowledge*.

Let us consider the title *Skyfall* (2012). Most of the recipients translated the title literally on the basis of meanings of the parts of the complex word "sky" and "fall". Thus the title was preferably translated into Russian with the main formed sense of "falling sky". The main presuppositions of genre and content are "science fiction", "catastrophe film", "super hero film". *Skyfall* is the name of the Scottish kin estate where James Bond has been living. The Russian viewers are not familiar with this information and for the Englishmen it is an obvious toponym. So the genre presuppositions are not adequate to the real content of the film. After the watching the trailer the presuppositions changed due to juxtaposition of audiovisual and verbal rows to "action film", "Bond film" and the translation of the title was transliterated in Russian letters as it got clear to the respondents that *Skyfall* is a place name. We may evaluate the translation of the film title in Russian in release with the addition «007: The coordinates of *Skyfall*» as quite effective for viewers' perception and interpretation. It at once hints upon the James Bond's adventures including his MI5 (British Security Service) call sign 007 well-known in the whole world. It happens because the title excites the intercultural knowledge and links since James Bond as an imaginary spy has become a universal myth of a hero. Thus we may confirm the statement of

S. Schwan and S. Ildirar that extended prior experience is required for appropriate interpretation of cinematographic titles and images (Schwan, Ildirar, 2010).

Sometimes it's difficult to translate the title as it comprises a neologism. The example is *Textuality* (2011). The recipients translated it literally. And the genre recognition varied from drama and horror through science fiction to comedy and melodrama. After trailer is seen the interpretations of the title got a little different angle: *SMS-life, SMS, Subtext, SMS-love*. The genre was also established as "comedy" and "melodrama". The spiral organization of the trailer with a parallel development of plot lines urged a lot of interest by the recipients and the wish to solve the riddles left by the entangled structure of the trailer. The professional translation of the title is quite interesting as it demonstrates the transfer of pun as in the original.

The difficulties in forming presuppositions may spring up from 2) *misinterpretation of idiomatic (metaphoric) or ironic meaning of the title*.

The analysis of the perception of the film title *The Bank Job* (2008) shows that a lot of recipients translated it as "Banker", "Bank officer", "White-collar" connecting the word *job* in a nomination with a direct meaning *work*, and leaving behind the metaphoric transference of the meaning interpreted *the bank job* as *work in a bank* and defined the genre as "a comedy film". Some part interpreted the title as "Robbery" and offered the characteristic to the film as "an action film". After watching the trailer the variant of the title was the only one containing the meaning "robbery", and genre was defined as "an action film", "criminal thriller". I think that adding the part "in Baker-Street" in Russian translation "Robbery in Baker-Street" may hint to the Russian viewers to one of Sherlock Holmes' films and perhaps this misinterpretation may urge the viewer to include it in the list of preferences but another side is disappointment from misinterpretation.

The idiomatic title of the film *Knocked Up* (2007) was mistranslated by the majority of the recipients. The predominant variants were connected with the basic meanings of the word *to knock* – "to bang, to tap, to beat, to strike, to hit" thus the film got the title in Russian "Bang", "Knock" / "Knock in the door". The genre was described as "a thriller", "a sport film". Only some recipients have discovered the idiomatic meaning of the phrasal verb *to knock up* which is connected with the state of waiting a baby and translated it as "Pregnant", "With a baby" with the corresponding genre presuppositions as "a family drama" or "melodrama". After the viewing the film trailer, which has a structure with parallel development of plot lines, the recipients selected other names to the film with a meaning: "Sudden pregnancy", "Surprise" and genre turned into "comedy", "youth comedy", "romance". The professional translation is a lucky one as it euphemizes a quite rude slang phrasal verb and adds to the title an element of amiable tease or humor making the viewer to smile.

Interpreting the title of the film *Intolerable Cruelty* (2003) all the recipients translated it directly and came to the conclusion that it's "a horror film", "thriller" or "action" because the word *cruelty* is associated in Russian mentality mostly with violence. After watching the trailer, which has a spiral organization with a lot of shots from different parts of the film and pack shorts in the middle, the ironic subtext was identified and the genre expectations changed to "melodrama", "comedy". The viewers suggested the variant with gender identification of a woman which is cruel or that the word *cruelty* in the title should be put into quotation marks for revealing the transferred meaning of the word and ironic sounding of the nomination. We may conclude that the interpreter who has suggested the professional title translation should have given (which is not the case) the pragmatic adaptation of the film title for the Russian speakers hinting to the ironic transference of meaning.

The difficulties in forming presuppositions of film genre and contents may be determined by 3) *the polysemantic structure of the key word in the title*.

If we take as an example the title of the film *Taken* (2007), we see that polysemy influenced the selection of the variants offered by the recipients. It results in a number of different adaptations – which vary in meanings from "be caught or locked" to "lend" and "bribe". The genre definitions are also multiple – "a thriller", "action", "comedy", "horror", "drama". One part of the recipients expected the film to have a plot with the aliens kidnapping people; the other part considered it to be about the criminal run away from prison; the third anticipated the violence towards stalked and taken people. The change of the opinion happens after representing a trailer which has a sequential linear chronologically ordered chain of shots depicting the development of the plot, revealing the idea of the film and explaining the semantic correlations of the title with the contents of the film.

The trailer contributes to creating adequate impression of the film and excludes potential viewer's cognitive dissonance.

Presuppositions may be formed in a wrong way 4) *if the original title gives no specializing units or explaining means to words of broad semantics.*

The first example of this type is the title *Faster* (2010). The recipients can't be aware of what or who is faster and faster of what or whom. There are no explaining details or additional lexical units for specification of the meaning. Thus a lot of recipients gave literal translation. The majority of the recipients were sure that it's a film about sport races. Some thought it being a biographical film or adventure film. There appeared other variants of translation of the title after watching a trailer with the meanings: *shooter, fast gun, quick draw*. The genre identification was also changed to "a thriller", "action". Visualization though the trailer that has a cyclic form of organization helped the viewers to reject false presuppositions and correctly identify the genre of the film.

The title of the film *The Holiday* (2006) gave a number of options for interpretation the noun «holiday» as a holiday, vacations and leave from work. Before the trailer the majority had an opinion that it would be a travelling or picnic story about young people spending nice time with funny twists of the plot and romance. Another part thought that it is a horror film perhaps about Christmas holiday in a house locked by the snow storm with a killer or maniac murdering one person or everybody. After the trailer all the recipients suggested the variant - «Leave » defining the genre as "comedy", "melodrama", "romance". The trailer has a structure with parallel development of plot lines without any mixture of them and ends by a cliffhanger which cast a spell on the recipients.

Difficulties with presupposing genre and contents of the film may be connected 5) *with improper ambiguous title in the original misleading the viewer*. It is true if we consider the title of the film *Looper* (2012). Adapting the form of the word in search of the equivalent the recipients rendered the title directly having found the meaning of the word in the dictionary stating the genre as «a thriller» or «action», «autobiography» or «film about aviation». The reaction is different after watching the trailer. The first presuppositions were not confirmed, then, the video row spirally developing allowed the viewers to understand that it's a film about time travelling. So the genre identification altered to «science fiction». The translation of the title also changed to transliteration. The work of a professional interpreter should be recognized as successful as it states the genre of the film quite unequivocally giving a variant that it's a time loop.

5. Conclusion

The research shows that the title plays an important role in presenting a film to public and predicting the genre and contents of the film. But there are a lot of difficulties facing the process to the target of correct decoding. They are the lack of linguistic-cultural knowledge and intertextuality, not enough linguistic awareness of stylistic connotations, idioms, neologisms etc., the difficulties with word polysemy and broad semantics, extralinguistic factors promoting strangeness, ambiguity and inexpressiveness of the original titles. The work of professional interpreters is aimed at leveling these aspects and suggesting the pragmatic adaptation of the title which will explain or hint to genre and contents indications. The research proves that in the choice of the film to view the recipient should be guided not only by the title but also by the trailer which helps to clear up for some extent the essence of the film message and its genre through different types of audio and video organization.

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