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## **A Course in Argumentation in Journalism in the Master's Curriculum: Using Russian Popular Science Magazines as Case Studies**

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### **Abstract**

At the end of the twentieth century, the mission of the discursive practice of popular science magazines was to draw public attention to environmental issues. The peak of interest in ecology fell on this period: environmental problems in Russia occupied the front pages of newspapers and magazines and featured widely on radio and television. By the mid-2000s, the level of interest in environmental issues had decreased markedly. Environmental issues in popular science magazines gave way to entertainment. Today, many environmental magazines provide tourist information in the format of creolized texts about holiday destinations, a healthy lifestyle, or the life of celebrities. Arguments calling for the preservation of the environment and sustainable lifestyles have been replaced by arguments calling for a life of enjoyment. This paper discusses the concept of a master degree course in argumentation in journalism as illustrated by the evolution of environmental argumentation in the popular science magazine, *Vokrug Sveta*.

**Keywords:** environmental media discourse, popular science magazine, argumentation, the *Vokrug Sveta* journal.

### **1. Introduction**

The Master's Degree Program in Foreign Languages and Translation in the Media offered by St Petersburg University is in a class of its own in the Russian higher education system. The program is interdisciplinary, and contains courses from both linguistic and media disciplines. Training is conducted primarily in English. In addition, students have the opportunity to take media studies courses in a second foreign language, either Spanish or Chinese. This academic program is aimed at meeting a market need for qualified experts possessing the combined skills required by a linguist, translator and interpreter with those of an international journalist. They will be immersed in the news agenda and able to analyze Russian political, socio-economic and cultural processes; and adapt to the new linguistic technologies which figure so prominently in the wide range of electronic systems now used within the communications and language professions. Equally critical is the ability to keep up with an ever-changing global landscape; have the capacity to generate cutting-edge media content within a variety of media forms; and to display a sound awareness of the cultural dimension of events, diplomatic protocol and business etiquette.

The program includes over forty different courses each of which develops a specific set of skills in the students. We highlight the importance of developing in students skills for creating media messages that have a persuasive impact. The course Argumentation in Journalism is designed to do just that. The objectives of the course include teaching students about argumentation as a field of communication theory and the concept of persuasive impact, helping them to identify the media genres

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in which argumentation is used, carry out a critical analysis of media messages, aimed to argue and persuade, and produce their own argumentative media discourse.

## 2. Materials and methods

The importance of this course is corroborated by a number of studies. A. Levitskaya and A. Fedorov stress the importance of developing of students' media competence so that they would be able to analyze manipulative influences in the media and test the reliability of media texts (Levitskaya, Fedorov, 2021). Bearing in mind that the course focuses on argumentation in the socio-political domain, it is worthwhile to draw upon a recent review of five monographs of Alexander Fedorov in which the author argues for integrating the media education component into school and university curricula with a special focus on developing a sociopolitical direction of media education (Kazakov, 2021). Another study urges the need for a humanitarian vector of studying the use of media and digital resources in education, addressing the phenomenon of the teacher's potential to use such resources (Tyunnikov et al., 2021).

Environmental discourse has featured in a number of studies in recent years. P. Ermolaeva et al provide critical reflections on the environmental media coverage across two Russian cities following environmental themes including air and water pollution, waste, sustainable transport, energy, environmental civic engagement, and organic food. Based on the media discourse analysis of twelve national and six regional Russian online mass media they come to the conclusion that national media focus primarily on the city of Moscow and cite pro-governmental journalists whereas the regional press gives voice to environmental activists and non-governmental organizations along with pro-governmental journalists. Collectively, the results demonstrate that media coverage does not accurately reflect the complex issues of urban stakeholders' relationship with environmental conflicts which are inevitable in the context of Russia's continuous reliance on the hydrocarbon sector (Ermolaeva et al., 2020)

A. Castrechini, E. Pol, and J. Guàrdia-Olmos analyze media representations of environmental issues and how they have been constructed and transformed after the Rio Summit in 1992 in Spanish newspapers (*La Vanguardia* and *El País*). The results suggest that there has been a movement from scientific to political discourse and a change towards greater reflection and social recognition of the relevance of environmental issues. The environment has shifted from being associated with nature to being predominately associated with the urban environment (Castrechini et al., 2014: 213-220).

Other studies focusing on the environmental and popular science discourses in the media include (Hjermitslev, 2019; Molek-Kozakowska, 2017; Jarreau, Porter, 2017)

Several researchers trace the evolution of Russian popular science magazines, whose educational mission in the late 1980s and early 1990s was to draw public attention to environmental problems (Kalinina, 2012: 108). She points out that this period saw the peak of interest in the environment: on the pages of newspapers and magazines, in radio and television programs, ecological ruin in the country had become one of the leading subjects. The high-quality *Ecos-Inform* magazine was launched in 1990. It had both Russian and English versions. In 1992, two new environmental publications emerged on the Russian information market at once: the *Eurasia-Monitoring* magazine and the *Greenpeace in Russia* newsletter, which gradually grew into a magazine. By the mid-1990s, attention to environmental issues had noticeably decreased. The topic of ecology was present in the press in the so-called "background" mode (Orekhova, 2000: 67). The reasons were the government's withdrawal from the environmental agenda, the decline of the grassroots environmental movement and the near death of the press caused by the most severe economic crisis of the 1990s. Environmental coverage came in waves with global environmental disasters, hazardous waste leaks, natural disasters, epidemics, etc.

In our analysis, we will focus on the present-day discourse of a former popular science magazine with a particular emphasis on identifying the rhetorical techniques used by arguers to influence their readers. The subject of the study is the *Vokrug Sveta (Around the World)* magazine, which is the oldest representative of popular science magazines in Russia. Since its founding in 1861, it has focused on travel, geography and the environment. Today, it largely covers tourism, travel to national attractions of Russia and ecotourism.

The objectives of the study determined the choice of methods of analysis. To confirm the hypothesis about the role of argumentation in diversifying the conceptual content of popular science discourse about tourism, argumentation discourse analysis methods were used. We drew

upon the following studies to build the methodological basis of argumentation discourse analysis: (Candarli, 2018; Gigante, 2017; Kolbel, Jentges, 2017; Lawrence, Sherry, 2021; Mallow et al., 2020; Mansouri et al., 2017; Westby, 2018).

### 3. Discussion

Globalization has created conditions for the development of international tourism. Journalism has become one of the key factors of this process. The discourse about traveling in Europe and Asia and vacations in famous resorts have occupied the information space for the past two decades. However, the Covid-19 pandemic changed the argumentation of tourism discourse by focusing on domestic tourism.

Following I. Erofeeva we identify media text as a space of representing the national view of the world reflected in the linguistic personality of the source. By the national view of the world we mean a system of spiritual values fixed in language systems and conditioned by the mental constructs of a specific national community (Erofeeva, 2015: 73).

Contemporary linguistics uses two approaches to determining the status of tourism discourse in terms of the subject, the purpose of communication and the type of communicator. According to the first approach, tourism discourse is viewed as a subtype of institutional advertising discourse. A broader point of view interprets tourism discourse as an independent type interacting with other types of discourse. In this study, we will adhere to the first approach, since the communicative space of travel magazines is determined by their main advertising and information function, where the information aspect comes to the fore. The purpose of communication in this media field is a dialogue-based socio-cultural impact on a non-specialist reader, the formation of their social identity (Vikulova, Makarova, 2013: 23-32). The main task of travel magazines is to promote science, provide a clear explanation of complex scientific information to a non-professional reader, and build a dialogue between the scientific community and a wide range of readers (Parafonova, 2017: 187).

The members of the Novosibirsk academic school Zagorulko, Garanina, Borovikova and Dolmanov (Zagorulko et al, 2019: 496) adhere to the traditional view of tourism discourse as a type of popular science discourse that mediates between the academic community and the larger public.

Tourism discourse has a rich repertoire of argumentation tools to achieve its impact. In his paper, *A Place as Argument*, A. Velez-Posada demonstrates that the descriptions of geographic locations can become part of argument alongside the account of a person who has visited this place. His study addresses the question of how places are part of the process of argumentation.

The argument from place (*argumentum a loco*) that is presented in classical rhetoric handbooks, particularly in Quintilian, is used as a model of analysis in order to emphasize the situated character of argumentative processes (Velez-Posada, 2020: 13-23). S. De Ascaniis and L. Cantoni analyze online travel reviews about an attraction of the Christian heritage, with the goal of unveiling the arguments that formed the opinion of visitors (Ascaniis, Cantoni, 2017: 179-202).

Argumentation has been studied from the standpoint of the correctness of constructing logical inferences and the use of rhetorical techniques, as well as from the standpoint of the structural organization of units and components of argumentation. A number of works have been devoted to the development of textual characteristics of argumentation, from ancient times to the present. It has been proved that there is a variety of methods of argumentation and each of them has only its inherent ability. Among the factors of persuasive influence, priority is given to rhetorical and psychological techniques. A. Freeley points out that argumentation recognizes emotional aspects (Freeley, 1996: 7).

M. Bazhenova and I. Kulagina, exploring the possibilities of the influence of popular science media text on the formation of the image of the world and its role in the formation of mentality, state that the reality of the world is presented not only as attractive and intriguing, but also as hidden and inaccessible. However, the unattractiveness of these aspects is veiled by vivid photographs and humorous explanations so that the reader's interest in the world of travel does not disappear under the influence of fear or disgust (Bazhenova, Kulagina, 2015: 5-9).

The issue of the effectiveness of argumentation in media text correlates with the problem of optimization of rhetorical techniques. It should be noted that the media text is characterized by the use of neorhetorical techniques. Ch. Perelman's new rhetoric shifted the emphasis from truth to opinion and assessment, from proof to argumentation, the ultimate goal of which is to obtain the consent of the audience (Perelman, Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971: 1). Perelman characterizes

argumentation as a modification of the current state of affairs - as a change, in particular, of views and assessments.

Within the framework of these ideas, the main goal of new rhetoric is to inspire the readers, presenting the situation or position as attractive to them. The means to achieve this goal are informal reasoning techniques. In the field of cognition and ideology, argumentation is aimed precisely at restructuring consciousness, changing the ideas, concepts and beliefs of people. When influencing decision-making, argumentation is focused on such a change in the views and judgments of people that can induce them to perform actions that have recently seemed unrealistic. Within the framework, the correctness of argumentation may fall prey to its effectiveness.

In the examples below, selected from Issues 1-6 of the *Vokrug Sveta* magazine for 2020, we can see the highly emotive concepts “the most magical holiday,” “fairy tales,” “beautiful towns, nature reserves”, “pristine liana and deciduous forest,” “splendor,” “stunning landscapes,” and the descriptions “secret,” “extremely attractive” combined with references to Russia as in "vacation in Russia", "refreshing directions for traveling in Russia". The authors advocate spending a vacation in Russia by referring to Russia as a land of natural beauty, mystery and cultural richness: "when planning travel, do not lose sight of remote corners of Russia", "Russia has an incredible number of beautiful towns, nature reserves and simply, as they say now, locations." The travel discourse is characterized by brevity, imagery, metaphoricity, reference to historical memory, emotional coloring, and expressiveness. Personal experiences play a great role (Example 10). The authors argue that today, a vacation in Russia is, in fact, not a tribute to circumstances, but a conscious choice of many tourists.

*Example 1.* When summer comes to the city, I want to get out into nature. *Vokrug Sveta* offers 5 refreshing destinations for traveling in Russia (Russian ecotourism. <http://www.vokrugsveta.ru/article/299349/>, last accessed on 21.10.2021)

*Example 2.* The area of the Curonian Spit National Park is more than six and a half thousand hectares. There are six hiking trails in the park: you can find out what a "drunken forest" is, see a real bird watching station and visit the highest sand dunes in Europe, with observation platforms which offer a view of the sea, forests and moving sands. If you prefer a more active holiday, be sure to arm yourself with a scuba diving flashlight and dive into the cool sea in search of sparkling Baltic amber – the main natural treasure of the region (Russian ecotourism. <http://www.vokrugsveta.ru/article/299349/>, accessed on 21.10.2021).

*Example 3.* It was in the Kislovodsk Park that a health path was first laid – a route for therapeutic, health-improving walking. This is a method of treatment that is especially loved by adherents of ecotourism: it provides for dosed, strictly doctor-prescribed physical activity in the form of walking and climbing the mountains. It is believed that the health path, which has been operating in the park since 1901, improves the activity of the heart muscle and heals the entire vascular system, the respiratory system and the nervous system (Russian ecotourism. <http://www.vokrugsveta.ru/article/299349/>, last accessed on 21.10.2021).

*Example 4.* The Valdai National Park is famous not only for the unique network of rivers and lakes, but also for the indigenous population, which to this day preserves the traditional way of life, crafts - primarily blacksmiths and bells – and beliefs. The city itself is more than five hundred years old, and tourists are attracted here, in addition to its rich history, by the microclimate: two hundred lakes, of which fifty-six occupy an area of more than twenty hectares, as well as ecologically clean berry, fish and mushroom grounds. The latter are the business card of the Valdai National Park (Russian ecotourism. <http://www.vokrugsveta.ru/article/299349/>, last accessed on 21.10.2021).

*Example 5.* The reserve, which is located in the Khasansky district of the Primorsky Territory, was founded in 1916 on the initiative of the forester T. Gorodetsky: he tried to save part of the taiga from uncontrolled felling. Here you will feel as if a time machine took you several millennia ago: a pristine liana and deciduous forest, waterfalls with the purest water, birdsong – all this is amazing. Far Eastern leopards, Amur tigers and sika deer are also found here (Russian ecotourism. <http://www.vokrugsveta.ru/article/299349/>, last accessed on 21.10.2021).

*Example 6.* Created on the banks of the Volga River under the auspices of UNESCO, the Samarskaya Luka National Park is intended to serve as a biosphere reserve in the Samara region. The total area of the park, divided into five forest districts, is almost 135 thousand hectares. The park has its own administrative center – the city of Zhigulevsk. In Samarskaya Luka you can find the golden eagle, mute swan, beaver, Siberian roe deer, various rodents, such as the dormouse

and the root vole, as well as elk. Snakes are found here, but they do not pose a danger to humans (Russian ecotourism. <http://www.vokrugsveta.ru/article/299349/>, last accessed on 21.10.2021).

*Example 7.* After a very stressful spring, you just need to unwind and change the scenery. What if the borders to your favorite holiday countries aren't open yet? There can be only one answer, because in Russia there is an incredible number of beautiful towns, nature reserves and simply, as they say now, locations. How to visit Valaam Island, Lake Baikal or the Curonian Spit without emptying your bank account? (Vacation in Russia can be affordable! Life hacks for travelers. <https://www.vokrugsveta.ru/company/news/335690/>, last accessed on 21.10.2021).

*Example 8.* Summer is a short period when the Russian North can be seen in all its splendor. Many have heard of Solovki: a tourist trail has long been trodden there, and yet getting to the archipelago is not as easy as, for example, to Valaam. Meanwhile, the centuries-old history of these places, stunning landscapes, the opportunity to spend an informative vacation and be alone with yourself make the Solovetsky Islands extremely attractive (The harsh charm of Solovki: 15 secrets of the protected archipelago. <http://www.vokrugsveta.ru/article/334810/>, last accessed on 21.10.2021).

*Example 9.* When planning your travels, do not lose sight of the remote corners of Russia, where fairy tales come to life, and the most magical holidays become reality (From the Urals to the seas of Tmutarakan: 5 fabulous routes in Russia. <http://www.vokrugsveta.ru/article/304989/>, accessed on 21.10.2021).

*Example 10.* Once I came across a filing of *Vokrug Sveta* magazines for 1928, where I came across the story of Scarlet Tundra. Its events unfold exactly in the place where I acquired the land. And I took what I read as a sign: I decided to open a theme park for recreation. I found the descendants of the characters mentioned in the story and organized a survival school. We have ideal conditions for people tired of civilization: tundra, a herd of deer, 30 husky sled dogs and two tamed foxes. And in winter, the bear came, and I got into the top of *Yandex* news as a girl who chased a clubfoot away with fireworks (Kings of the North: An unexpected Murmansk through the eyes of local residents. <http://www.vokrugsveta.ru/article/324837/>, last accessed on 21.10.2021).

#### 4. Results

The study of the Russian popular magazine *Vokrug Sveta* found that its content heavily focuses on tourist discourse.

The results of the study using the methods of content and discourse analysis allow us to conclude that journalists have been tasked with breaking stereotypes related to recreation, tourism and tourists, creating an idea of the tourist attractiveness of Russian regions and revealing the hidden potential of promising destinations. The key message of the argument is that Russia is a great country, with a great variety of cultural sites, with unique opportunities for the development of active and educational tourism.

The aim of the tourist discourse of popular science magazines is to convince the reader that the best kind of tourism is travel and recreation in his country, which contributes to the reader's knowledge of historical and cultural values. By introducing new knowledge into the model of the addressee's world and modifying the existing ones, carefully, with the help of introductory words and euphemisms, influencing the reader's feelings, the author evokes the necessary emotions that would lead to appropriate behavior.

A distinctive feature is the displacement of environmental discourse about environmental pollution from the content. For example, drawing attention to the striking beauty of Lake Baikal, journalists do not provide information about the environmental problems of this lake. Describing the healing nature of Crimea, they do not talk about the high seismological danger of the region, about the unreliability of treatment facilities in the water area of the southern coast of Crimea, about the pollution of the sea in the area of ports, about oil and fuel spills. They the fact that the downside of tourism is the growth of anthropogenic pressure on the region.

In the 2000s, there was no consistency and accounting for interactions of tactical and strategic orientation directly between the objects of the emerging segment of popular science journals. We can talk about a split in this segment, which led to a clear differentiation of popular science magazines that has preserved an ecological discourse, and popular science magazines that have appropriated the glossy format. The absence of restrictions for foreign companies on the ownership of Russian print media, new technologies imported by Western glossy magazines, which demonstrated the advantage of visual content over text, impressions over content, contributed to



the monetization of content. Popular science magazines started to reflect the ideology of globalization, forming an idea of local cultures in the global context of their interaction with each other and, through the regional component, securing cross-cultural ties between countries.

As a result of the active development of the travel segment, popular science magazines have been transformed into lifestyle publications - a new system of socially significant values. Such magazines could be compared to factories producing models of lifestyle. While business interest in popular science magazines has dramatically declined, magazines that have morphed into a glossy publication have retained most of their readership numbers. The content of the “new” popular science magazine includes information about other countries as potential vacation destinations, a healthy lifestyle, and celebrity stories fitted with an abundance of photographs and illustrative graphics, which function as an additional argument in favor of the tourist destination.

The concept of this type of popular science magazines is the orientation towards consumption rather than towards knowledge. The indicators of the competitiveness, efficiency and profitability of such a magazine depend on the audience interested in information about the services of hotels, consumers aimed at enjoying visiting popular tourism sites, shopping, and national cuisines. According to J. Baudrillard, consumption characterizes a society of abundance. This is a deep, intensive process of selection, organization and regular renewal of household items, which includes every member of society (Baudrillard, 2006: 7). The growing multimedia also set its own terms: there is a tendency to use more photos and reduce the volume of texts, and “clip” thinking determines the “primitivism” of the content, which results in the publication of shorter articles (Bushev, 2008: 32).

## 5. Conclusion

At the end of the twentieth century, the mission of Russian popular science magazines was to draw public attention to environmental issues. Argumentation had become the core of the environmental media discourse. The peak of interest in ecology fell on this period: environmental problems in Russia occupied the front pages of newspapers and magazines and featured widely in radio and television. By the mid-2000s, the level of interest in environmental issues had decreased markedly. Environmental issues in popular science magazines gave way to entertainment. Such magazines have been turned into geographic magazines as the case of the *Vokrug Sveta* magazine testifies. Today, environmental discourse in a major segment of popular science magazines has turned from discussing environmental issues to providing information about holiday destinations, a healthy lifestyle, or the life of celebrities. Argumentation is present in the texts as a way of explaining the benefits of a particular type of tourism.

The main goal of popular science magazines is to inspire their readers, presenting the situation or position as attractive to them. The means to achieve this goal are informal reasoning techniques. In the field of cognition and ideology, argumentation is aimed precisely at restructuring consciousness, changing the ideas, concepts and beliefs of people. When influencing decision-making, argumentation is focused on such a change in the views and judgments of people that can induce them to perform actions that have recently seemed unrealistic. Within the framework, the correctness of argumentation may fall prey to its effectiveness. In hushing up inconvenient facts, an author strives to make the argument more convincing.

Globalization has created conditions for the rapid exchange of information and increased tourist flows on an international scale. The discourse about leisure and tourism abroad has been filling the information space for a long time. Until recently, popular science geographic magazines did not pay enough attention to domestic tourism. The economic and epidemiological situation in 2020 changed the travel discourse, switching the attention of the audience from international tourism to domestic tourism around historical places and resorts in Russia, which present values for Russians. Today, with the national borders closed for fear of a coronavirus epidemic, popular science magazines are faced with the task of opening Russia to their readers, getting rid of stereotypes, convincing them to look in a new way at spending a vacation in their own country.

The study of argumentation used in the *Vokrug Sveta* magazine allows journalism students to trace the evolution of the genre of popular science magazines towards travel publications and help them understand the ways journalists use arguments to fit their purposes. The Argumentation in Journalism course develops in master’s students the skills needed for creating media messages that have a persuasive impact.

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