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*Kozlovska Ganna, Ukrainian Academy
of Banking of National Bank of Ukraine
PhD, Associate Professor of Foreign Languages Department*

Manifestation of sensory perceptions in newspaper informational texts

Abstract: The paper focuses on the explication of author's sensory perception of the world in newspaper informational texts. Sensory elements express author's inner awareness of factual information and report his impressions via his individual perception of taste, smell, touch, sight, and hearing. These markers of subjectivity perform various stylistic and pragmatic functions.

Keywords: sensory perception, text, newspaper weather forecast report, information

While activations of sensorial experiences are considered to be of crucial importance for symbolization involving high-order cognitive processes, they are also part and parcel of our daily experiences, including language. For instance, we tend to let our eyes do all the work. But growing babies are not like us. They have to put all objects into their mouths to discover their feel, size, shape and taste, because they have not yet learned to get this information through their eyes. Blind people, too, see with their other senses. They can lead people who can see through thick fog or a power failure, because they have learned to hear echoes, the sound of water, traffic and machinery; they feel the hill slope under their feet, or the pavement change; they smell the daytime scents from coffee shop or shoe factory, and know which way the wind is blowing them. The knowledge and skills of sculptors, wine makers, piano tuners, florists, macramé creators require that they are 'tuned' to various sense modalities and sensory literacy – from single sense modalities to multiple ones. Even such usual thing as washing your hands can give you the chance of feeling the hot and cold water, soap and bubbles, your wet hands rubbing one another, the dry towel. Moreover, you can describe how the process sounds, what the soap bubbles look like, how the soap smells and tastes. All these reflect our inclinations towards certain colors, smell, textures, taste or sounds, and our decisions and preferences are the result of – conscious or unconscious – operations involving several senses. In other words, we are born synaesthetes, i.e. intrinsically cross-sensory beings.

Regardless of the basic nature of sensory perceptions and experiences, the subject still remains under-explored in linguistics – in contrast to what happens in other disciplines within the humanities such as anthropology, psychology, or philosophy. In the framework of Cognitive Semantics, Leonard Talmy [1] has proposed the notion 'ception' as a possible construct to overcome the scholarly tendency to deal with discrete categories and clearly located boundaries through a cognitive domain encompassing traditional notions of both perception and conception. If we want to gain further insights into the ways we construe the various worlds at our disposal, the relationship between our sensing, thinking, and communicating the world cannot be neglected.

The overall objective of the article is to contribute to our understanding of how author's sensory perception of the world is verbally manifested in newspaper informational texts, namely – in newspaper weather forecast report (NWFR) of 'The Washington Times'.

When a piece of writing creates rich, colorful or precise pictures, we say that it has a great deal of imagery. To use imagery effectively an author tries to find those images or ideas which relate as closely as possible to what an object is or is like. Especially he will try to be accurate about the ways in which the object appeals to the senses. The problem of sense perception attracts special attention in the linguistic research of fiction. Sensory words can be used by the author as the means of symbolization and the instrument for creating fiction model of reality. Many writers have individual concepts and figurative mechanism of perception that are verbally manifested in their works via their specific ways of sensing the world. For instance, Vladimir Nabokov is considered to be the writer who mostly 'sees', Ivan Bunin is the writer with 'sensitive hearing' [2]. The informational texts are objective, accurate, precise, and factual, that's why the study of sensory evidentiality – markers of subjectivity - in such kind of texts is actual.

Details of sight, sound, touch, smell, and hearing are essential ingredients of the imaginative author's work in NWFR as an addresser usually tries to avoid flat statements of facts. By means of five senses perceptive knowledge is acquired. Being the mental representation of reality, text appears to be the marker of author's perceptive knowledge actualized in NWFR via peculiar set of linguistic means. By such means we understand sensory words giving the audience a chance to look at weather/weather phenomena with all five senses and, most important of all, with the sense of imagination.

It's common knowledge that music is "1) an art of sound in time that expresses ideas and emotions in significant forms through the elements of rhythm, melody, harmony, and color; 2) the tones or sounds employed, occurring in single line (melody) or multiple lines (harmony), and sounded or to be sounded by one or more voices or instruments, or both" [3]. W. J. Humpheries, a well-known scientist in physics of atmosphere, used the metaphor 'weather music' time and again in his book "Ways of the Weather". By saying that, the author implies the process of sound waves' forming and spreading in the atmosphere that corresponds to the notion 'meteorological acoustics' [4], but he uses the 'sonorous' metaphorical expression instead.

Various sounds of weather/weather phenomena have been always serving as the source of inspiration for many composers (series of four violin concertos "The Four Seasons" by Antonio Vivaldi, a set of twelve orchestral suites depicting the twelve months of the year "New and very curious musical instrument calendar" by Gregor Werner, oratorio "The Seasons" by Franz Joseph Haydn, ballet "The Seasons" by Alexander Glazunov, a ballet and orchestral concert work "The Rite of Spring" by Igor Stravinsky, "Autumn Song" for soprano and strings by Edvard Grieg, a set of twelve short character pieces for solo piano "The Seasons" by Pyotr Tchaikovsky, etc). 'Weather music' is also heard in NWFR because many sensory words are vivid descriptions of sounds: *window-rattling winds (May 31)*, *thunderstorms roared (April 9)*, *thunderstorms will rumble (October 10)*, *a storm system will trigger a couple of showers (October 9)*, *without sounding fog horns (August 30)*.

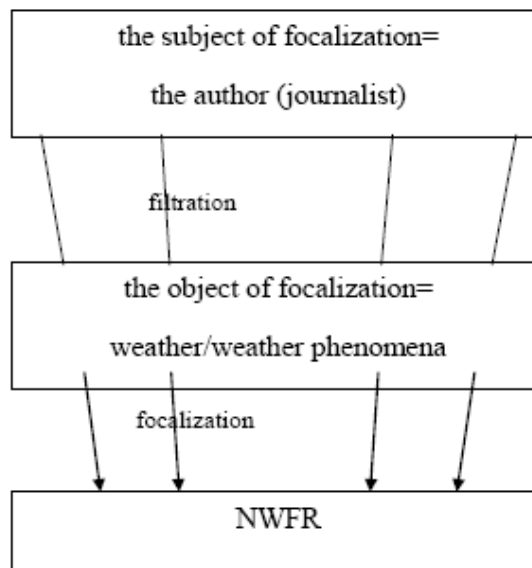
'Ornamentation' brightens NWFR by means of color-scheme word-stock of the English language providing spectacular description of weather/weather phenomena: *bright and sunny today (September 6)*, *a blinding thunderstorm (May 9)*, *gloomy weather (May 1)*, *a yellow, smoky haze (September 6)*, *spectacular weather (July 13)*, *green frogs were heard in Trappe, Pa. (March 17)*, *snow whitened the ground (June 1)*, *dense smog caused unusual darkness at midday (May 19)*, *as dark as midnight (May 19)*.

Sometimes a reader is given a chance 'to touch' weather phenomena learning some insights of its nature: *temperatures touching 90 degrees (May 18), thunderstorms will lash (September 10), thunderstorms will brush (September 7), thunderstorms will hug (September 9), thunderstorms will cool (July 22), baking heat (August 9), a touch of a shower (April 21), cool weather (June 25), cool and hot air (June 5).*

The samples of 'weather smell and taste' are not numerous and less varied. They tend to look at weather/weather phenomena from the unusual point of view, as the author experiments with interesting descriptive angles: *The air smells autumn-like (August 30), very cool air will bring a scent of autumn (August 24), grape fruit-sized hail gave a sour taste of weather to area residents (July 30), unseasonably warm air will provide a taste of spring fever (March 26), very cool air will provide a taste of autumn (September 8).*

'Sensory filtration' of weather/weather phenomena is based upon the perceptive knowledge of the author. 'Filtrated' objects are actualized in the text via peculiar set of linguistic means, it being known that the author (journalist) is a focalizer and weather/weather phenomenon is the object of focalization. Focalization stages of author's sensory perception in NWFR can be shown as the scheme (see Scheme I) based upon the variant suggested by O.O. Zmievskaja [5].

Scheme I. Focalization Stages of Author's Sensory Perception in NWFR



When echoing the objective reality the addresser brings into the NWFR the peculiar element of subjectivity which is conditioned by the creative nature of cognition itself. How well a piece of writing is perceived by the audience is likely to be a result of author's creativity as creative text is new, it is not copied, imitated, or reproduced. NWFR is a good example for the author to brainstorm a little working out alternative methods of presenting factual information.

Sensory words seem to be flashes of creativity when the author tries to inject his own insights, his own personality into NWFR as "insights and personality are at the foundation of

creativity" [6]. Even in case of the dry, pedantic exposition of facts it is impossible to evade self-expression, modal arrangement of report, explication of addresser's individual perception of the world. Individual perception of the world is reflected in author's attitude toward a Man and the Environment and is revealed in his mood, feelings, senses and actions [7]. Representation of weather/weather phenomena as the object of focalization in the light of author's sensory perception points implicitly at addresser's estimation of phenomena in the text. Reader's attitude toward weather/weather phenomena is conditioned by the author's attitude to it when the fragments of addresser's perception of the world pass into addressee's minds. Verbal expression of individual perception of the world embracing subjective modality into that, turns to be the means of manifestation of direct influence on the recipient aimed at changing his knowledge on the level of images and opinions, i.e. pragmatic influence on reader's perception of the world and one of effective methods of convincing.

Sensory words may be defined as new elements to present factual information. Information is more likely to get audience attention when it is perceived as new. When readers think they know something already, they are less likely to pay attention. It is up to the author not only to find and present information that will be new to the audience but also to concentrate on the 'newness'. When the author is reporting weather-forecast information in the presentation form with which most of the readers are familiar, he tries to uncover new angles, new applications, and new perspectives on the material. By the term of 'newness' we understand whether the information adds some new knowledge or gives new insights to the information the audience already possesses. An addresser uses sensory words so that an addressee can see and feel and smell and taste and hear along with him as if the author tried to let readers' senses work for them giving shape to their sensory experiences. New images of weather/weather phenomenon help readers feel as authors do.

To be effective, NWFR should be interesting and must provide an approximation of reality for the reader. To achieve this reality or verisimilitude, the author makes use of descriptive elements within NWFR which appeal to and record the message of the senses – taste, smell, touch, sight, and hearing. NWFR must be current and timely but at the same time it must be written up in such a way as to hold readers' interest. L.J. Rosen and L. Behrens points out that readers have a certain attention span and a certain radar; they know when writers are invested in their work – when, for instance, writers have taken time to state a thought precisely or to render a description vividly [8]. Being descriptive details, a couple of sensory words stands out in NWFR in order to be focused on as the author knows that it is better to leave the reader with one or a few strong impressions than to give a lot of details which the reader does not remember at all. Sensory words help to engage the reader to the fullest extent, i.e. to get the reader right into the information contents by appealing as imaginatively as possible to his sensory experience. NWFR that the recipient remembers best from his reading remains in his mind because of the vividness of sensory words with which the author presents it.

Information is more likely to be understood and remembered when it is well organized. Sensory words provide weather information to be better organized. Such a neat organization is not easy, for the things we are accustomed to often have details that escape our notice. Thus, describing such everyday object as weather the author should have good sensory experience to inject some specific details in NWFR. Skillful journalists combine 'the general and the specific', i.e. factual and subjective information the successful consolidation of which contributes to more efficient NWFR organization.

Good organization does not necessarily influence the total amount of information remembered. Information is more likely to be understood and retained if it is associated. By association we understand the tendency of a thought to recall others similar to it. While reading the NWFR recipients are associating because sensory words remind them of another words, ideas, feelings, events, cf.: *a touch of shower (April 21)*, *window-rattling winds (May 31)*, *blinding thunderstorm (May 9)*, *a sour taste of weather (July 30)*, *a scent of autumn (August 24)*. The examples confirm the fact that the author succeeded in association striking enough for the audience to ensure retention of key informative blocks via sensory impact.

NWFR abounds in precisely chosen and arranged information blocks – both objective and subjective. Author's sensory perception acquires special textual importance and appears to be one of the indications of addresser's presence in NWFR. The audience is able to see the hand of the author shaping weather-forecast information for maximum effect and having at his disposal such a zest as sensory words performing various stylistic and pragmatic functions.

Sensory words may be defined as attention-getting devices, new elements to present factual information. The author of NWFR engages in attaining a maximum balance between his awareness that he doesn't want to be neutral sometimes and his belief that he should fulfill the requirements of objective reporting. Involving all senses in the description of the perception makes the representation of facts more complete and might contribute to its persuasive effect. Decoding the subjective sprinkles with awareness and concentration, an addressee unconsciously adds the fragments of addresser's perception of the world to his own perception system. Thus, sensory words in NWFR can be regarded as creative, descriptive, original, new, organization-promoting, and association-exciting.

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