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SPECIFICS OF PRECEDENT-SETTING PHENOMENA FOREGROUNDING IN THE TELEVISION SHOW “THE OFFICE”

Summary. The article examines the concept of precedentuality and the different types of precedent-setting phenomena, focusing on the specifics of their foregrounding in the TV series “The Office”. Precedentuality is a complex phenomenon that cannot be fully understood without considering its cognitive, cultural, psychological, and communicative aspects. Thus, it is considered as a feature of human consciousness that allows people to use verbal and nonverbal signs (precedent-setting phenomena) in created texts to convey meaning that is significant for the speakers of a particular linguistic culture. The research focuses on the main types of precedent-setting phenomena that are commonly distinguished. They are namely the following ones: precedent texts, precedent utterances, precedent names, precedent situations, and, above all, the status of precedentuality is also thoroughly studied in the course of the analysis. We distinguished 52 precedent-setting phenomena among 25 selected episodes of the television show “The Office”. Ultimately, the most prevalent precedent-setting phenomenon turned out to be a precedent situation, with a total of 20 instances. During our research, we discerned a certain pattern in the objects referenced within precedent situations. Most frequently, the characters in the series incorporated technological innovations that were prevalent and widely adopted at the time of filming. This pattern is attributed to the phenomenon of globalization, which played a significant role in shaping the nature and objects of precedent-setting phenomena identified in the series. Additionally, we found that a majority of precedent-setting phenomena exhibit a national status, influenced by the creators’ intent to capture the idiosyncrasies and quirks of the American workplace, making the show a reflection of its time and place. This strategy aligns with the tradition of sitcoms that often draw on culturally specific elements to engage viewers and create a sense of familiarity. While the show does incorporate some universal status precedent phenomena, the emphasis on national character stems from the desire to fully engage its target audience and provide a more authentic portrayal of the American workplace.

We envision the potential for further research by exploring the changing scope of cultural references in media throughout time. This involves closely examining how these cultural phenomena mirror changes in societal norms, values, and technological progress. Another productive research direction foresees conducting a cross-cultural analysis, investigating differences in precedent-setting phenomena across various English-speaking cultures.

Key words: precedentuality, precedent-setting phenomena, precedent text, precedent utterance, precedent name, precedent situation, status of precedentuality.

Formulation of the problem. The TV show “The Office” has garnered immense popularity worldwide, captivating audiences with its unique blend of humor and poignancy. While the show’s cultural impact is undeniable, its linguistic nuances and the role of precedent-setting phenomena in shaping its narrative and humor have received relatively limited scholarly attention. This lacuna in research presents a compelling opportunity to explore the intricacies of precedent-setting phenomena in a modern television show, particularly one that has achieved such widespread resonance. The scarcity of research on precedent-setting phenomena in modern television shows, especially in the context of linguistic analysis, highlights the need for a comprehensive study that delves into this unexplored territory. The TV show “The Office” serves as an ideal subject for such an investigation, offering a rich tapestry of linguistic elements and a diverse range of precedent-setting phenomena embedded within its narrative.

The research topic is **relevant** not only because delving into the lexical-semantic aspects of precedent-setting phenomena in the TV show “The Office” offers a profound contribution to the field of linguistics, but also because by examining how these cultural references are employed and interpreted within the context of a modern television show, one can gain a deeper understanding of precedent-setting phenomena and their linguistic nuances. Additionally, the lexical-semantic analysis of precedent-setting phenomena in “The Office” can serve as a foundation for comparative studies with other modern television shows, enabling linguists to identify patterns, variations, and cultural differences in the use of precedent-setting phenomena across different media.

The **subject matter** of the study is the distinctive features, such as type, status, object and frequency of use of the precedent-setting phenomena in the TV show “The Office”. The **objective** of the research is the variability of precedent-setting phenomena used in the television show “The Office”. The **aim** of the study is to analyze the variability of precedent-setting phenomena featured in the TV show “The Office”, to identify the patterns of their use, and statistically substantiate our findings.

The precedent-setting phenomena created by TV series influence the cultural background, defining not only aesthetic standards but also social identity structures. It is through the large-scale entry of such works into the global cultural arena that they become real cultural agents that define precedent-setting phenomena that change the perception of contemporary realities and form new paradigms in public thinking. That is why for our analysis we decided to choose

a popular series in the English-language discourse, which was once the most popular television series and still remains so – “The Office” (US production, 2005-2013).

The Office’s script is an important artifact that is actualized in other texts and can serve as an object for studying the mechanisms of intelligence and cognitive processes in the context of mass culture. This approach allows us to consider the series as a key source for studying and revealing precedent-setting phenomena in American society.

“The Office” contains many references to famous sayings, literary works, quotes from famous people and other precedent-setting phenomena, including references to George Orwell, William Shakespeare, Scott Fitzgerald; “Hamlet”, “The Great Gatsby”, “1984”; Albert Einstein, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and many others.

In total, we examined 26 episodes of this series, taking thirteen episodes from the first and last seasons, and identified 52 precedent-setting phenomena (PP). We decided to classify them by the type of PP, the subject of the reference and the status of the precedentality. This allowed us to identify the most frequent objects of reference in the precedent phenomena of a given TV series, their status, and the types of PP that prevail in them.

Presentation of the main research material. In speaking of precedentality, we refer to the specific feature of human consciousness to use verbal and non-verbal (paralinguistic) markers (precedent-setting phenomena) in created texts that are the carriers of certain semantic information that is significant for speakers of a particular linguistic culture in a specific period of its development [1].

This understanding of precedentality is consistent with the interpretation of precedent-setting phenomena such as those which, according to O.O. Selivanova, allow speakers of a particular ethnic culture and language to recognize culturally significant attitudes and norms, value orientations, cultural codes, and the possibility of their reinterpretation, and to organize their communicative behavior and text production in accordance with these cultural knowledge [2].

Nowadays, the media have a significant impact on people’s minds. They can use various linguistic means to convey their information to the audience. One of these means can be proceeded by the use of precedent-setting phenomena. According to O. Selivanova, precedent-setting phenomena belong to the domain of cultural and linguistic competence, which enables self-identification of a person as a representative of a certain ethnic group and a carrier of the relevant culture, i.e. determines the criteria of ethnicity and cultural identity – a person’s awareness of belonging to a certain culture through the recognition of its values, standards, ideas, priorities, tastes, traditions, etc., identification with cultural models, which allow one to navigate in a certain socio-cultural environment, organize one’s own life, foresee its consequences, choose a particular type, manner, and form of communication [2].

Precedent-setting phenomena can have a universal and nationally specific status (examples of the former include world wars, political events, cataclysms, world-famous people and characters in different works of art, films, works of world literature, etc.). These are some of the examples of universal precedent-setting phenomena that we have identified in The Office series: **“To be or not to be, that is the question. To be manager, or not to be manager, that is the question”**; **“I may not be a genius like Albert Einstein, but I’m**

pretty smart in my own way”; **“Be like Jesus Christ. Forgive those who have trespassed against us”**.

Precedent-setting phenomena, such as historical events or cultural changes, define the main aspects of nationally specific status. These phenomena not only reflect national specificity, but also influence the formation of mentality and relationships between people. For example: **“It’s like living in ‘1984’. Big Brother is always watching.”**; **“Just like George Washington led our country to victory in the Revolutionary War, we can lead Dunder Mifflin to victory in the war against Sabre”**.

At the verbal level, such precedent conceptual structures can be represented by a name (onym), a phrase, an utterance of a predicative nature, a text fragment and a whole text [3].

O. I. Potapenko, Y. O. Potapenko, L. P. Kozhukhovska, T. V. Chuban, T. M. Levchenko and I. V. Burchyk indicate the following types of precedent-setting phenomena: a precedent name (an individual name of a famous person, character of a work, artifact); a precedent situation (a significant event that actually took place in the life of an ethnic group and civilization); a precedent text (a famous work actualized in other texts, the reference to which is controlled by the mechanisms of intertextuality) [4]. In our study, we considered the following types of precedent phenomena: a precedent text, a precedent name, a precedent utterance and a precedent situation.

The analysed material shows that the most frequent type of precedent-setting phenomena in the television show “The Office” is the precedent situation. This affirms the idea of exceptional importance and substantial impact of precedent situations, historical events in the life of ethnic groups and civilizations. The successful use of precedent situations, in particular in “The Office” series, is due to the fact that they allow for the vivid depiction of significant events, offering a clear and concise portrayal of characters, their features and traits, relationships. This enhances the audience’s comprehension and provides a humorous perspective on complex situations that arise in the workplace environment.

Among the most frequent ones are the precedent situation concerning the creation and popularization of the social network founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 – Facebook. It became available to everyone in 2006 and was first mentioned in the show in season 3 episode 3, titled “Dunder Mifflin Haircut”, where Dwight says: **“You’re on a Facebook! Why you’ve been telling people you’re not on a Facebook?”**, since then Facebook was mentioned regularly until the last season. For example, in season 6, episode 24 titled “The Cover-Up” Pam Beesly says: **“Donna and I have a Facebook friend of a friend in common”**; in season 8, episode 16, titled “After Hours” Jim is being addressed to as the one who **“Got a real Facebook energy going on”**.

Another interesting phenomenon that we discovered in the framework of our research was the frequency of iPod use in the Office series. We have identified 5 precedent-setting phenomena with the iPod being the object of the precedent situations. iPod was released in 2001, but was first mentioned in the show in season 3 episode 7, titled “Business School” (2007), where Jim says: **“I couldn’t find your iPod”**. Since then the iPod was used in various contexts:

- **Definitely stole my iPod** (season 4 episode 9);
- **Korean film on my iPod** (season 5 episode 18);
- **I wish my iPod could make phone calls** (season 6 episode 8);
- **Or we could give them all iPods** (season 8 episode 12).

The references to the technologies of that time do not stop there. In 2003, video calling and messaging software, called Skype was invented. The number of registered Skype users was about 50 million in 2005, which of course resolved into being an actively used object of precedent situations of *The Office* series. We have detected 2 precedent-setting phenomena, related to Skype in the show. The first mention of it was in season six episode 26, called “Whistleblower”, where Kelly says: “*I text, I phone, I Skype ...*”. Another occurrence of the famous video calling software was made by Andy in season 9 episode 7, called “The Whale”, where he says: “*I mean, the Skype sessions are like the only thing keeping me sane out here, you know*”.

Technological progress continued to be an inspiration of precedent-setting phenomena in the show, leading to the frequent mention of a home game console Xbox, manufactured by Microsoft in 2001. First debut in “*The Office*” the console made in season 3 episode 6, called “Diwali”. Ryan was asked what he was saving money for, to which he answered: “*Oh, or travel? And, um, buy an Xbox.*” Another mentioning of the device was when Michael told Santa in season 6 episode 13 called “Secret Santa” that: “*I would like an Xbox, and a TV that’s compatible with an Xbox.*”

The research material indicates the evolution of the use of precedent situations in “*The Office*” and its interconnection with global trends. The initial absence of references to social media, video hosting, and gaming consoles in the early seasons reflects the socio-cultural context of that time. The dichotomy observed in the objects of precedent situations underscores changes in the perception of technology and social networks. The developments related to Facebook, Skype, Xbox, and iPod signify the active incorporation of global technological trends into the show’s narrative. Analyzing these precedents-setting phenomena in the context of globalization dynamics contributes to understanding how the series responds to societal and technological changes. It demonstrates the creators’ ability to adapt to contemporary trends and integrate them humorously and narratively into “*The Office*”.

Throughout the series, there are a huge number of precedent-setting names, both of a national and universal status. Most of the precedent names, in our opinion, are rather of a national status, because most of these people are Americans who are popular among Americans. This includes: Dane Cook, Morgan Freeman, Marlon Brando, Daniel LaRusso and Ali Larter. The use of precedent-setting phenomena of a national status, such as the mention of popular American figures in “*The Office*”, is particularly employed due to the specific target audience the show is created for and the contextual relevance. This linguistic strategy aligns with the audience’s experiences, reflecting the cultural milieu in which they exist. By incorporating names familiar to the viewers, the show leverages the audience’s shared experiences and cultural context, enhancing relatability and resonating with the viewers’ everyday reality. In essence, the use of national status precedent-setting phenomena is a deliberate linguistic choice tailored to the audience and the context in which they engage in the show.

Despite many culture-specific precedent names, we have found plenty of universal precedent phenomena. Such as mentioning of Shakespeare, Albert Einstein, Beyoncé, Harry Potter, Tom Cruise, George Washington, Jesus Christ and Jennifer Aniston. These individuals or characters have achieved a level of global fame, often transcending cultural and linguistic boundaries. William Shakespeare is a foundational figure in literature, studied

at educational institutions worldwide. The widespread inclusion of Shakespeare’s works in curricula ensures that many people, regardless of cultural background, encounter his works during their education.

As a global pop icon, Beyoncé’s fame transcends music. Her influence extends into various facets of popular culture, including fashion, activism, and entertainment. The widespread accessibility of her music and public persona has made her a recognizable and relatable figure for diverse audiences.

Harry Potter, as the character created by J.K. Rowling, has become a cultural phenomenon through the successful book series and film adaptations. The magical world of Harry Potter has captured the imaginations of readers and viewers worldwide, making it a shared cultural reference. The choice to reference these figures in “*The Office*” reflects the show’s intention to connect with a diverse audience by drawing on universally recognized names that have left a significant impact in literature, science, music, and popular culture.

The most common precedent name occurring in the episodes of the framework of our work is Albert Einstein, a renowned physicist, celebrated for his groundbreaking contributions to science, particularly to the theory of relativity. It was used in different context, among which are the following precedent-setting phenomena:

1. *Have you ever noticed that Albert Einstein’s hair looked like a bird’s nest? Maybe that’s why he was so smart.*

2. *I may not be a genius like Albert Einstein, but I’m pretty smart in my own way.*

3. *As Albert Einstein once said, ‘Time is relative’. So, technically, I wasn’t late to the meeting.*

So, in “*The Office*”, Albert Einstein is referenced in a manner that reflects a blend of admiration for his unsurpassed intelligence and a subtle playful humor, emphasizing Einstein’s status as the epitome of intellectual excellence.

As for precedent utterances, the most frequent objects of precedentality were works of Shakespeare, particularly the quote from his famous play “*Hamlet*”, “*To be, or not to be*” cited in various contexts of the television show “*The Office*”. For example:

1. *To be or not to be, that is the question. To be manager, or not to be manager, that is the question.*

2. *As Shakespeare once said, “To be or not to be, that is the question”. To be productive, or not to be productive, that is the question.*

3. *Pam, you got this award because you are you. You are Pam, and that’s all that matters. As Shakespeare once said, “To be or not to be, that is the question”.*

By using precedent utterances, referencing Shakespeare, specifically “*Hamlet*”, the show taps into a shared cultural and educational experience. The use of such well-known quotes broadens the appeal of the show, creating a connection with viewers who may not be avid Shakespeare enthusiasts but have encountered his works in their education.

Conclusions and prospects for further research.

Having analyzed the specifics of precedent-setting phenomena foregrounding in the TV series “*The Office*”, we came to the conclusion that among the precedent-setting phenomena identified in the show, precedent situations, referring to relevant at show’s time technical innovations are the most common. Other types of precedent-setting phenomena have been identified, along

with their peculiarities and tendencies identified in the framework of the study. "The Office" achieves relatability and humor through a pervasive integration of precedent-setting phenomena, wherein the audience readily identifies and comprehends these allusions. Culture, denoting society's aggregated knowledge, artistic expressions, and customary practices, serves as the milieu enveloping individuals. The show effectively leverages this shared cultural backdrop, fostering a collective understanding that enables laughter at references to historical figures like Ben Franklin or contemporary personalities such as M. Night Shyamalan.

The prospect for further research we see in delving into the evolution of cultural references over time within media, scrutinizing how such phenomena reflect shifts in societal norms, values, and technological advancements. Another promising direction entails a cross-cultural analysis, examining variations in precedent-setting phenomena across diverse English-speaking cultures and regions, while considering the influence of globalization on shared cultural elements. Narrative and genre analysis provide an opportunity to explore how specific storytelling formats, such as sitcoms, dramas, or news programs, strategically employ precedent-setting phenomena to enhance characterization, engage audiences, and contribute to narrative flow.

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Ємельянова О., Гержан Я. Особливості актуалізації прецедентних феноменів у телевізійному серіалі «Офіс»

Анотація. Статтю присвячено аналізу явища прецедентності та різновидам прецедентних феноменів. Основний акцент був зроблений на специфіці актуалізації прецедентних феноменів у серіалі «Офіс». Прецедентність є складним явищем, яке не може бути повністю

зрозумілим без врахування його когнітивних, культурних, психологічних та комунікативних аспектів. Таким чином, вона розглядається як властивість людської свідомості, що дозволяє використовувати вербальні та невербальні знаки (прецедентні явища) у створених текстах для передачі значення, що є важливим для носіїв певної мовної культури. У ході дослідження було виявлено основні типи прецедентних явищ, серед яких визначено: прецедентний текст, прецедентне висловлювання, прецедентне ім'я, прецедентну ситуацію, а також характер прецедентності, виявлений під час аналізу. У ході роботи було виокремлено 52 прецедентних феномени серед 25 обраних епізодів серіалу «Офіс». Результат дослідження свідчить, що найпоширенішим прецедентним феноменом виявилася прецедентна ситуація, із загальною кількістю випадків: 20. Під час дослідження встановлено певну закономірність у об'єктах посилань у прецедентних ситуаціях. Найчастіше персонажі серіалу посилалися на технологічні інновації, які були актуальними та широко використовувалися на момент зйомок. Ця закономірність обумовлена явищем глобалізації, яка відіграла значну роль у формуванні характеру та об'єктів прецедентних явищ, що були виявлені у серіалі. Крім того, нами було встановлено що більшість прецедентних феноменів «Офісу» мають національний характер, обумовлений бажанням творців серіалу відобразити особливості та нюанси американського робочого середовища, роблячи серіал відображенням тогочасного контексту проживання. Ця стратегія є характерною для комедійних серіалів, які часто використовують культурно-специфічні феномени для залучення глядачів та створення відчуття залученості-розуміння. Хоча у серіалі також наявні універсальні прецедентні феномени, наголос на національному характері базується на бажанні отримати визнання і заручитися підтримкою основної аудиторії та забезпечити більш автентичне відображення американського робочого середовища.

Потенціал подальшого дослідження ми вбачаємо у вивченні специфіки змін та трансформацій культурних відсилок до засобів масової інформації та соціальних медіа з плином часом. Це включає ретельне вивчення того, як культурні явища відображають зміни в суспільних нормах, цінностях та технологічному прогресі. Ще одним перспективним напрямком є проведення міжкультурного аналізу, вивчення особливостей представлення прецедентних феноменів у різних англійських культурах.

Ключові слова: прецедентність, прецедентні феномени, прецедентний текст, прецедентне висловлювання, прецедентне ім'я, прецедентна ситуація, характер прецедентності.