

## CAUSE-GENETIC THEORY OF TEXT CONTENT IN ITS APPLICATION TO MASS MEDIA TEXT STUDIES

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Cause-Genetic theory is a vision of a complex language sign content (text content in particular) as a «function-structure-activity» synthesis. It views text as representing (static quality), organising (functional quality) and reproducing (in communication activity) reality within its 4 manifestations: epistemological (subject-object relations), behavioural (intersubject relations), representational (intertextual system relations), and reproductional reality (textual continuity). While functioning text can reveal «knowledge-attitude», «subject-bias--object-bias», or «sense-bias--essence-bias» content focuses. Potentially it contains all these dichotomies as they are built of the same functional elements only in different grouping (clusters). The theory gives birth to new research programs, some of them being tested in practical research of Belarusian printed mass media.

Cause-genetic content theory, cortege (intersubject content reality), sign cortege (intersubject representation), functional quadrum dichotomies, textual fields (textual reminiscences), mass media text research.

The last 3-d part of the XX-th century has seen at least three basic theoretical approaches to text content. The representatives of the first were searching for the answer to the question **“what is content?”**, thus being occupied with the problem how many types and aspects text content has, what they are in particular, how text content is organized. This approach has given birth to a number of structural text content models. The representatives of the second approach started with asking themselves another question **“where is content:** with the addressee, addresser or just in the text as it is?” asserting necessity to introduce functional communicational text content modeling. Then inevitably was the turn of the question **«why is content?»**, that brought with itself the stage of discourse analysis practices and an interest rather in a text context than in a text content.

All these stages could be placed within the common theoretical framework: 1) the burst of **structuralism** was connected with the persistent awareness of the society of what kind of world we live in, how it influences upon us, can we rely upon it and upon words, texts..., that is whether what we talk about really exists or not; 2) the burst of **functionalism** strengthened within the question «where?» was connected with the interest to the subjects of communication: who communicates with whom and with what purpose, 'what are we, how we express ourselves through words, texts – this started to be of great importance for researchers; 3) postmodernism has strengthened certain indifference to reality, shifting attention of linguists to the problem of text continuity, intertextuality, focusing on **discourse studies** with its stress on contextual situation. Such is just a recent history of content studies.:

While making a revision of theoretical approaches to content studies the researchers express the idea of strong interdependence and intertwining of them moving to the conclusion that functionalism is just a logical continuation of structuralism, while discourse focus is nothing but a turn from a language unit of analysis to speech unit of analysis. In other words relationship between text and discourse might resemble the relationship between a sentence and a phrase with only one remark - we are coming to a level of greater complexity.

So whether we pass from one level to another, content plan still remains in the focus of linguists' attention.

At the 8<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Linguists E. Benveniste compared meaning (content) with Gorgon from a Greek myth, who casts a spell over linguists: not a single linguistic discipline can «pass by» and do without the notion of meaning/content.. More over, every other generation just as every other stage in language science development needs rethinking the idea of the content plan. And with discourse era of language research we do need it.

## I. CAUSE GENETIC THEORY AXIOMATICS

The cause genetic theory of language content has been developed since the 80s and declared itself through four basic ideas: (1) possibility (with appearance of new technologies in communication) to treat such text complexes as newspaper editions, and further on TV programs (that reproduce themselves in each new copy) as language signs and to study their content plan accordingly, just as we study texts, sentences, words. In other words, they are to be treated as holistic though differentiated functional structure (Oukhvanova-Shmygova, 1988, 1990); (2) to overcome the monistic approach to language sign content vision adding the dimensions of cortège into its structure (discourse community representation) (Oukhvanova-Shmygova, 1992, 1996a); (3) to accept the content as a dialectic unity of dynamic and static entities (Oukhvanova-Shmygova, 1993); (4) to differentiate idea-bias and phenomenon-bias content types in language sign content. (Oukhvanova-Shmygova, 1993)

So it is a highly synthetical approach to language sign content study accepting it as **one in three** coating: «category (function)-phenomenon (representation)-activity».

**Dynamic (functional) qualities of text content express themselves through the fact that:**

1) text is a category of communication and information (its core is a process of constant transformations of propositions and illocutions, that is an exchange of object-bias and subject-bias information within their interdependence);

2) text is a category of reflection and assessment (its core is knowledge-attitude dichotomy);

3) text is a psycho-social category (its core is sense- and essence -related content)

**Static (representative) qualities of text content express themselves through the fact that :**

1) text is an assimilated reality (rationally and emotionally) – in other words text reflects an element of world picture;

2) text is an assimilated sign reality – text reflects language-bias world picture element;

3) text is an assimilated behavioral reality – text reflects the picture of communicants' behavior; (intersubject reality)

4) text is an assimilated sign behavioral reality -- text reflects the picture of communicants' language behavior (intertextual reality).

**Activity qualities of text content (social and individual sign qualities) express themselves through the fact that :**

1) text is a sign of social practice, that is a pragmatic sign, which means that with it the subject reproduces social activity (pragmatics of reflection) and individual act (pragmatics of behavior); **TEXT IS A SOCIAL ACTIVITY AND INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR**

2) text is a sign of cognition (epistemological sign), which means that with it the subject infers his/her personal meaning to the picture of the universe (epistemology of individual) but does it through generalized communicative patterns (social epistemology); **TEXT IS AN INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR.**

3) text is a paradigmatically bound sign, that means that its content plan depends on intertextual systematic ties or, otherwise, text fields, which are both subject-bias (genre fields) and object-bias (text systematization according to their topics). Fields setting is a result of social text organization, that is the choice of individuals (whatever it is) is made from something predetermined; **TEXT IS A SOCIAL TEXTUAL ACTIVITY DEFINED BY ITS SYSTEM AND THUS CLOSED.**

4) text is a syntagmatically bound sign, that means that its content plan depends on intertextual continuity, which is individual textual practice but socially (historically) 'sifting' (selected); **TEXT IS AN INDIVIDUAL TEXTUAL ACTIVITY DEFINED BY ITS HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND THUS OPENED.**

One can hardly deny all this qualities of text content but may doubt whether it is possible to unite all of them while modeling. We think it is and would like to demonstrate it with graphical illustrations. So **figures 1 and 2** show the sources (factors, *as a permanent cause*, and factums, *as a resulting cause*) of text content and demonstrate its involvement into corresponding activities which are all interdependent. **Figures 3 and 4** are designed to demonstrate the way text content

structure starts to be defined. **Figure 5** illustrates text content as a unity of four idea-bias (that function as content organizing codes) and four phenomenon-bias content elements (content

kernel). At the same time it points out at functional (universal) content elements, and starts another stage of content modeling: from static to dynamic or genetic proper content modeling. **Figures 6, 7 and 8** show how, in particular, content «works» in text activity. Here we can see universal content elements organized in quadrium dichotomies As for **figure 9**, it starts with breaking symmetry in content modeling and proposes «to open a content envelop» to the field of text functions, that is to see text content not as a potential but manifested one.

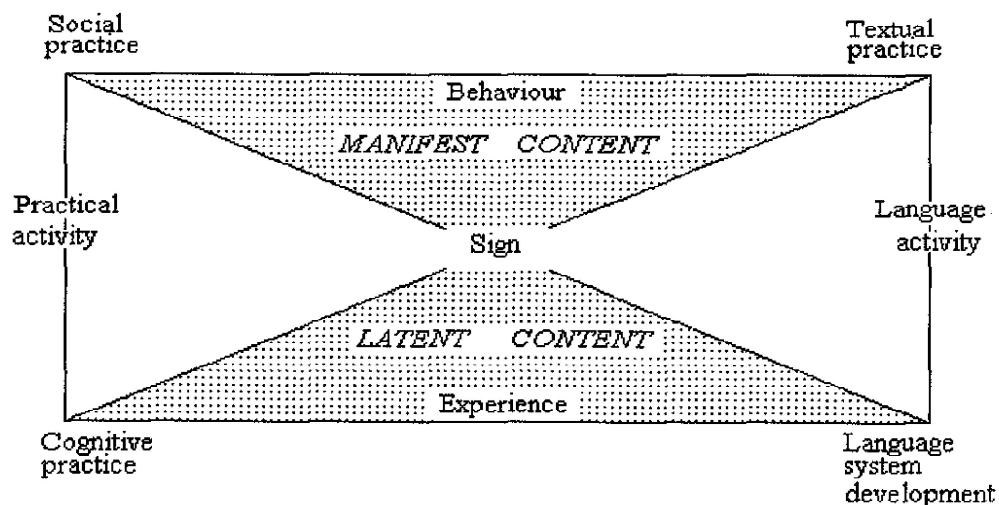


Fig.1. Text involvement into social, epistemological, textual and language practices.  
Text content sources (factors).

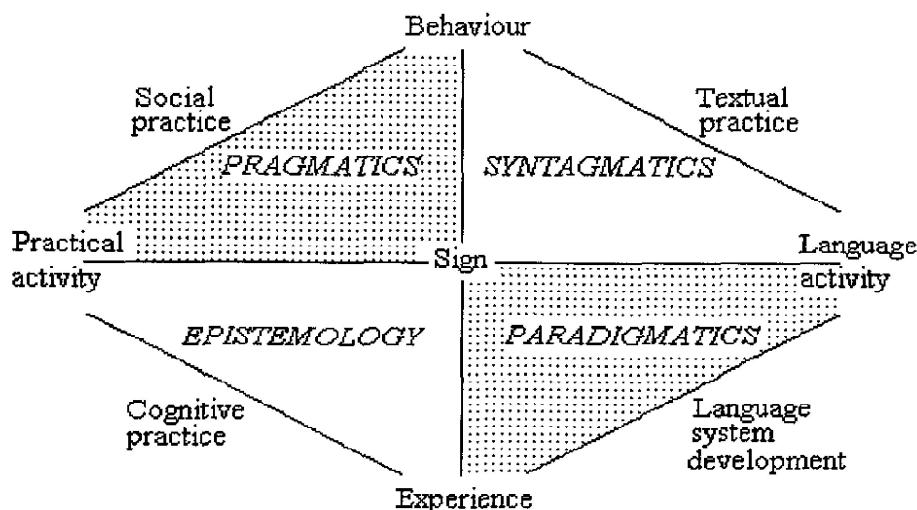
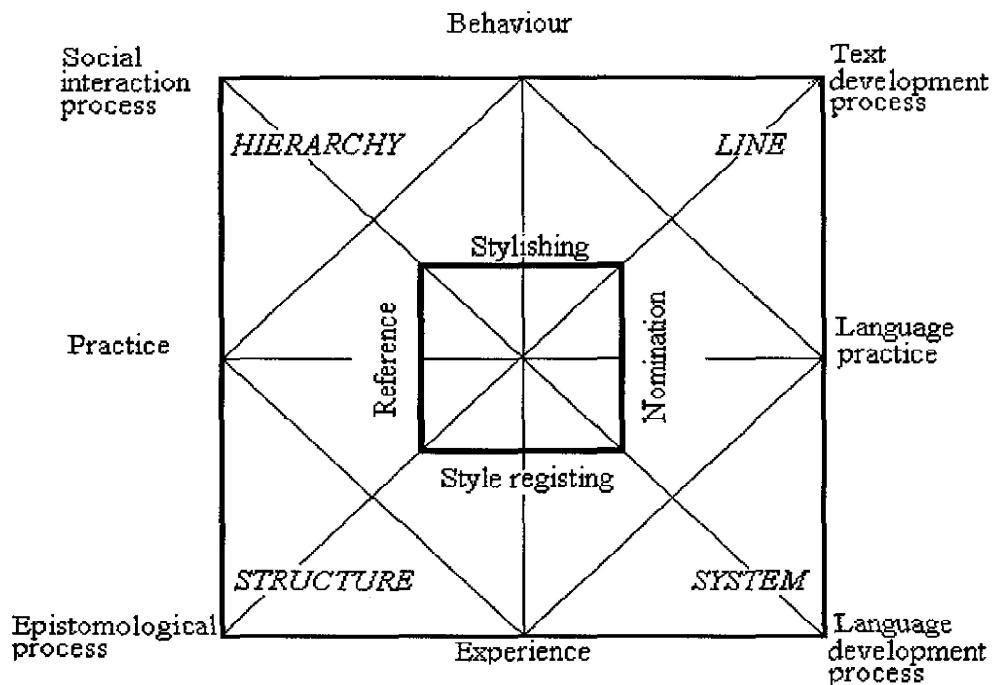


Fig.2. Text involvement into practical (subject-object), behavioural (subject-subject), nominative (object-sign) and communicative (subject-sign) activities. Text content sources (factums).



Pict.3. The main directions of text content kernel formation.

(At this stage of content modeling we come to see pragmatics, epistemology, paradigmatics and syntagmatics not as types of meaning that sign semiotic relations brings, but as space text dimensions and so codes organizing content spacially. Of course, all these four space dimensions can hardly exist independently but on a high level of abstract thinking. But it is necessary for us to do this in order to demonstrate a unity of the whole notion of the text content. At the same time we are to separate them in order to see how in particular text content is functioning.)

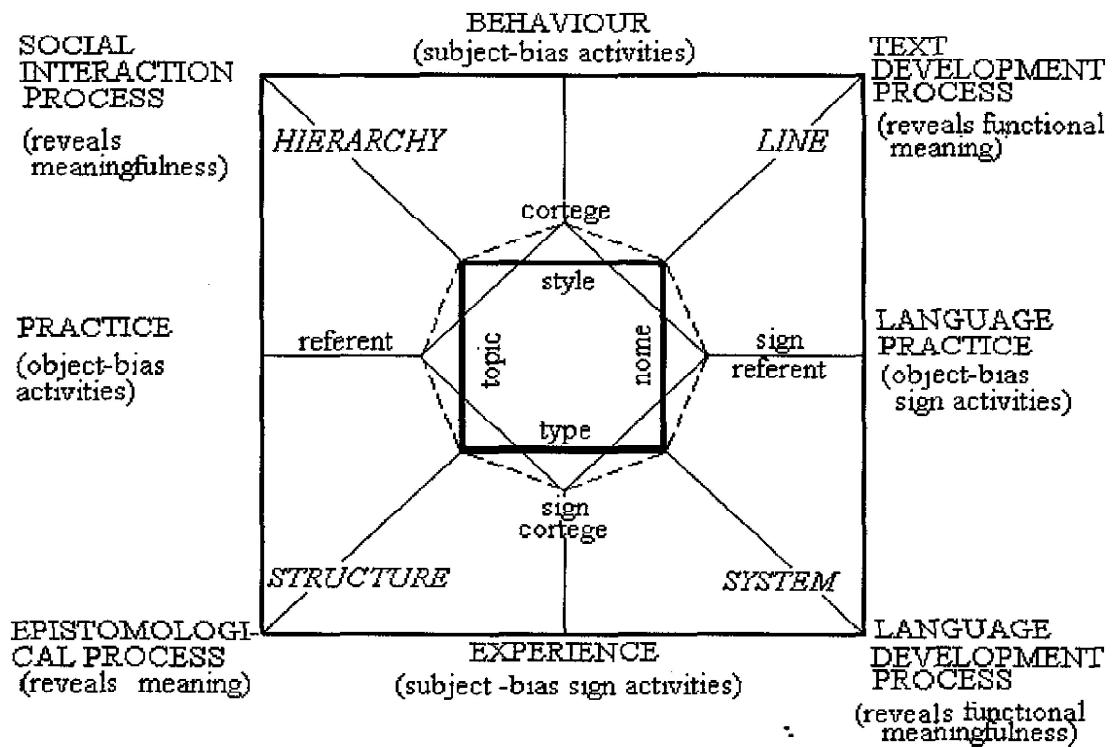


Fig.4. Content kernel of a language sign.

(It is composed of *referent* (reflection of a subject-object relation in a topic: structured and assessed), *cortege* (reflection of a subject-subject relation in a style of communication: assessed and continued), and their representation plan – *sign referent* (referent representation through paradigmatic and syntagmatic nomination of a referent) and *sign cortege* (cortege representation in its typical structures and paradigms) The kernel proper of a text content is: topic and its 'nome', style and type of communication. We see it possible to extend the notion of each element of the kernel thanks to their position in the model.)

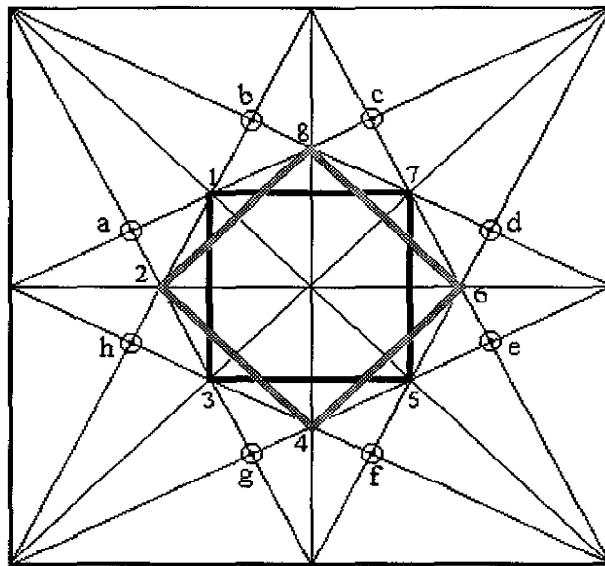


Fig.5. Cause-genetic model of text content (structural and functional elements of text content):

Structural elements:

- organizing content codes:-1-pragmatical , 3-epistemological , 5-paradigmatical, 7-syntagmatical
- content phenomena: 2-referent, 6-sign referent, 8-cortege, 4-sign cortege.

Functional elements:

- topics (a) assessed and (h) structured,
- nominative topics, organized (d) syntagmatically and (e) paradigmatically,
- corteges (b) assessed, and (c) linear (in time) developed,
- nominative corteges, organized (f) systematically (stylistic and genre organization) and (g) structurally (text composition).

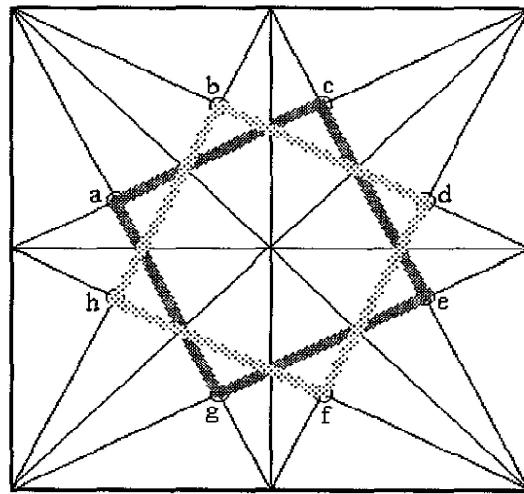


Fig.6. Content organizing dichotomy: «subject-bias quadrium» (b-d-f-h) --. «object bias quadrium» (a-c-e-g).

(This dichotomy can be read also as «personal-social». We start demonstrating content quadrium dichotomies from this one to prove once again that text is a dielectic unity. It cannot be one without the other. At the same time we are to distinguish them because text is socialization of an individual and his/her identity).

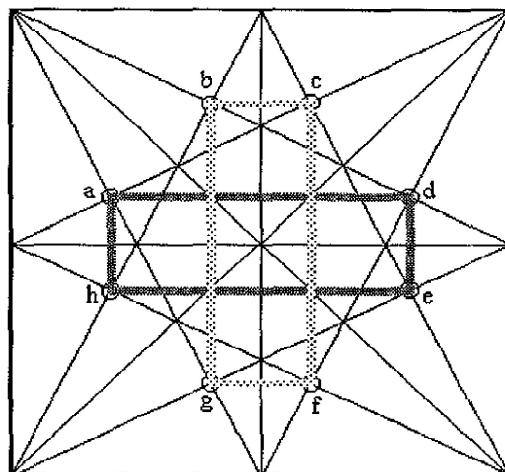


Fig.7. «Sense-bias quadrium» (a-d-c-h) and «essence-bias quadrium» (b-c-f-g).

(Sense notion in this case is close to traditional linguistic content vision, while essence notion is close to traditional literary content vision. So, in a way, cause-genetic model is interdisciplinary.).

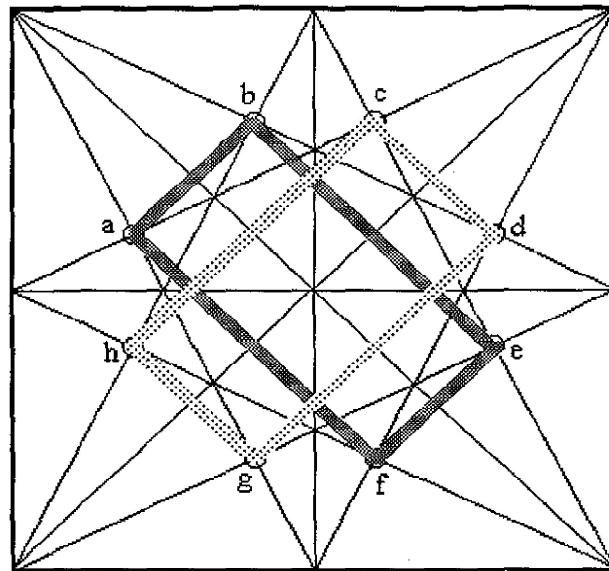


Fig.8. «Knowledge-bias quadrium» (c-d-g-h) and «attitude bias quadrium» (a-b-e-f).

(We take words «knowledge» and «attitude» here in their narrow meaning, stressing the idea of «open» and «close» text characteristics)

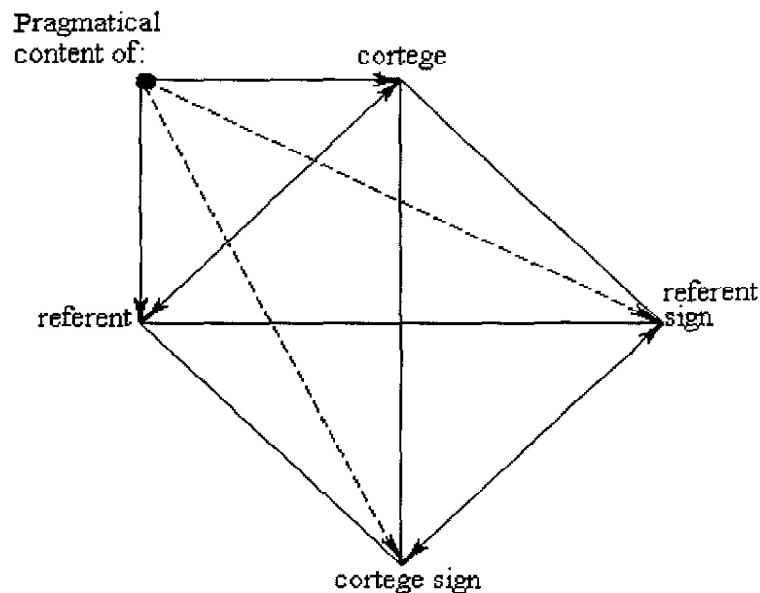


Fig.9. A pragmatically «opened envelope model» of text content.

## II. FUNCTIONAL LEVEL OF CAUSE GENETIC ANALYSIS

An important idea originating from cause genetic modeling at the dynamic stage is the following: no topic ever exists in a text as it is, but only if it is assessed and structurally specified, just as a cortege has sense only when it is assessed and linear presented (has a historical development). In its turn nominative topics (sign topics) exist only if they have paradigmatic and syntagmatic realization just as cortege nomination (cortege representation) comes with genre and composition text organization. In other words, we can read **eight elements of text functional content** through four content phenomena in their code representation: topics, assessed and structured, nominative topics, organized syntagmatically and paradigmatically, corteges assessed, and linear developed, nominative corteges, organized systematically (stylistic and genre organization) and structurally (text composition).

As we see it now, the whole model is alive as it is always as if a balance itself. It works on dichotomies or, more correct to say, on double or threefold dichotomies: each is balanced by the other and back. Because of this, it is a highly symmetrical model at a starting point, but stops to be like that when it comes into functioning. Thus we study text content focusing not on everything but on something particular: whether on knowledge or attitude, sense or essence, subject or object content. But the importance to keep all elements together remains. Why do we think it necessary to unite all in one?

## III. RESEARCH PROGRAMS BASED ON CAUSE GENETIC CONTENT THEORY

The theory has been built on the assumption that texts are functioning in the society in such a way that «writers are writing and readers are reading» For some people texts bring knowledge, for others - attitudes, for some - sense, for others - essence information, for some information about people, for others - about object reality. But these are the same texts, being produced (coded) and decoded under the same rules. But what is important is their focus. With its actualization texts start to be different, are treated as different and can be studied in a different way.

We are starting from the point that text activity is both highly individual and social at the same time. In fact, in Belarusian printed mass media we have witnessed changes in content focus practically within every 3-year period. First, at the end of the 80s informative value of a newspaper, necessity to separate facts from attitudes was highly discussed. And that was the period when persuasion and manipulation through media texts started to be noticed and discussed by the public. But in early 90s this topic was not popular any more. And the topic that started to be important was people in the news and people who were writing or speaking (TV, Radio texts) about people in the news. «Who» started to be if not more important than «what» but, at least, equal with it. In the mid of the 90s «who» seemed not of a great interest to the public. Readers, listeners started to be tired of those faces, and texts about them. «What for», «why», «where we are going», «whether it has any sense or not», «what will be left afterwards» -- these questions have changed the focus of text content completely. And the end of the 90s seem to «close the circle»: we can state that the question of text manipulation is again on the agenda. This is just a frame of reference with which we started and to which we came while making a research of Belarusian mass media texts based on cause genetic research program (Oukhvanova-Shmygova, 1991, 1994, 1995).

The research program was carried out in accordance with cause genetic model. We were to find out what was object-bias in a newspaper content and what was subject-bias. So in one

case we looked for actualization in newspaper content universal elements «a-c-e-g» and in another case «b-d-f-h». To do this we were to find out and list the topics of editions proving that they are real topics but not phantoms with «maps» of their theme-rheme development and finding their places in a text hierarchy organization. At the same time we looked for text lexical fields, grammar and syntactic forms, paralinguistic text qualities (graphical design), so that to learn about topic representation quality. Equally, we were interested in all forms of address, text stylistic and genre properties, narrative qualities, compositional patterns (cortege representation quality), but at the same time we studied newspaper material with role analysis, took interest in its status characteristics and how it was demonstrated. And finally, how these content qualities were presented sequentially in newspaper editions.

All results of the research were grouped accordingly, giving a vivid picture of newspaper content focuses, presenting material for their different typology classifications, including new typology approaches based on topical and cortege values (preferences) of a newspaper edition (Oukhvanova-Shmygova, 1994, and Oukhvanova, 1996b). In particular, such types of newspapers were found that are not only cortege-oriented (cortege sufficiency within certain types of communicative patterns), but also addresser- or addressee-centered.

The research was repeated (on the material of 10 Belarusian newspapers) in 1997 when we used cause genetic research program for finding out newspapers' interaction with the audience on the material of signing the Union between Russia and Belarus (the material studied covered newspaper editions for two months - April and May 1997), and proved the fact that cause genetic approach can be very effective as classification and focus research pattern for mass media text studies (Oukhvanova-Shmygova, 1998). This theory was used as a background idea for better understanding not only linguistic but also social and psychological properties of different types of newspapers. We also started a number of content-analysis with cortege information to be its categories of analysis (Oukhvanova-Shmygova, 1998).

The results of the first and second research (carried out by a research group) proved possibility of such study not only within interdisciplinary but also multicultural research study. In fact, cause genetic modeling centered on text content (but not text context) study is very efficient in reading texts of other cultures (a researcher is anyway not familiar enough with a context that is foreign to him/her; *etic* vs. *emic* type of study). Text context is relevant for us 'a priori' but in our research we deal with text as the only issue, text that absorbs everything around and that starts to act as a subject of communication (in particular we regard a newspaper as a subject of communication). Only if we accept this assumption we can speak (on abstract level of cognition) about existence of intertextual and intersubject world as our vertical reality and vertical community, which is interwoven with our real world. This complexity, though, presents itself as indivisible unity for communicants.

Cause genetic modeling and research programming can serve, on our opinion, as a base for comparative European newspaper research presentation and newspaper behavior on the material of most important topics for European continent. In our view this will work for closer understanding and most effective communication.

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