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The stylistic form of press releases – perspectives of analyses

KEY WORDS

press, style, communication, discourse, type

ABSTRACT

The author presents the problem of the stylistic form of press releases in three perspectives, referring to the concepts of functional styles, communication and discourse. Moreover, the issues of diversity of expression in terms of genre are presented at all of these levels. The style of press releases is seen by the author as a polymorphic, capacious and open category. This means the possibility of examining the style at different levels of concretization: in the most abstract manner (the level of communication and /or discourse), in a less abstract tone (the level of genres) and in the specific way (the level of expression). Due to this approach, the grid of stylistic (often syncretic) features thickens and the exponents are concretized. The style is examined descriptively, not differentially.

The article is an attempt to outline the existing linguistic reflection on the form of press releases. In this presentation, I will pursue my own cognitive path, since my research on this subject involves a combination of old and new themes, examines new problems against the background of tradition and puts emphasis on specific methodological issues. I therefore suggest looking at the linguistic form of press releases in three perspectives which, as will be demonstrated, are tightly interrelated and shed light on one another. The presentation encompasses the following set of analytical planes: a) stylistic perspective, b) communicative perspective, c) discursive perspective.

Press releases in a stylistic perspective

This perspective should be linked to the intensive studies which have been carried out in Poland since the mid-20th century and focused on language diversification, constructing the diagrams of language varieties, defining the relations between them, dominance of differential descriptions, conviction about the autonomy of particular varieties, incorporation of the historical perspective. Those circumstances shaped the nominal decisions and the scopes of characteristics of the stylistic variety associated with the press (media). This type of research

was rooted in linguistic stylistics and in a certain specific concept of functional style which was constantly modified by various researchers¹.

Although the status of the variety associated with the media (especially with the press) attracted the attention from many linguists, their studies did not produce any binding solutions. There was no consensus as regards the definition of the status of the variety and the manner of nomination. The literature on the subject employed the following terms: publicistic style, journalistic style, publicistic-journalistic style and informational-publicistic style². While placing their reflections and analyses in the proper methodological context, certain linguists did not distinguish the publicist-journalistic style as they were not able to identify the inventory of its devices³.

Despite such declarations, the publicistic style was finally identified because of the sphere of social communication in which it was believed to be used. The wide scope of that concept, its internal diversification (politics, advertising, propaganda) and changeable relations with other styles were the reasons for its rather general and fragmentary description⁴. Moreover, the research trend initiated by the stylists in the mid-20th century was gradually phasing out. However, the linguists and press scientists in various research centres continued their studies on the language of particular types of media (press, radio, television).

The return to the category of style after many years of scientific inertia could not mean the repetition of even the basic assumptions of the above-mentioned concepts. In the first place, it was noted that, as pointed out by Stanisław Gajda⁵, the stratification order (which includes language varieties and hierarchical relations between them) “no longer corresponds

¹ See S. Gajda, *Styl i stylistyka. Zagadnienia ogólne* [Style and stylistics. General issues], [in:] *Przewodnik po stylistyce polskiej* [A guide to Polish stylistics], ed. S. Gajda, Opole 1995, p. 25. The latest synthetic approach to the problem is found in the book by D. Zdunkiewicz-Jedynak, *Wykłady ze stylistyki* [Lectures on stylistics], Warszawa 2008, pp. 22–36.

² See E. Szczurek, *Styl publicystyczny* [Publicistic style] [in:] *Przewodnik po stylistyce polskiej* [Guide to Polish stylistics], pp. 363–364; M. Wojtak, *Stylistyczne ukształtowanie gatunków prasowych* [Stylistic form of press genres] [in:] *Współczesne analizy dyskursu. Kognitywna analiza dyskursu a inne metody badawcze* [Contemporary discourse analyses. A cognitive analysis of discourse and other research methods], eds. M. Krauz, S. Gajda, Rzeszów 2005, p. 145.

³ See A. Wilkoń, *Typologia odmian współczesnej polszczyzny* [Typology of varieties of the contemporary Polish language], Katowice 2000, p. 48. The author states: “I have eliminated from here the publicistic language (style) because it may represent a genre of the artistic language (e.g. an essay, a column or a review), or a form of the formal language (interview, commentary, discussion of the events)”. It is worth noting that the studies on the publicistic variety of language were described in a publication in which the author gives a detailed account of the performed analyses and their results. See E. Szczurek, *Styl publicystyczny*, op. cit., pp. 363–396. The latest study in which clear echoes of those concepts can be found is the monograph by M.T. Lizisowa, *Style funkcjonalne w dziennikarstwie prasowym* [Functional styles in press journalism], Kielce 2009.

⁴ See H. Kurkowska, S. Skorupka, *Stylistyka polska* [Polish stylistics], 5th edition with additions. Warszawa 2001, pp. 287–288.

⁵ S. Gajda, *Media – stylowy tygiel współczesnej polszczyzny* [Media - a stylistic melting pot of the contemporary Polish language] [in:] *Język w mediach masowych* [Language in mass media], eds. J. Bralczyk, K. Mosiołek-Kłosińska, Warszawa 2000, p. 21.

to the dynamically changing communicative and linguistic reality”, but enables, on a macro scale, the explanation and typological classification of various linguistic phenomena, also in relation to the press (or, more broadly, the media).

When joining the research on the language variety associated with the reborn press, I did not initially exclude the possibility of returning to the category of typical (functional) style⁶. I initially considered the term publicistic-journalistic style to be the terminological label that was the closest to my concept of categories of style⁷. I believed that the style could be seen as a variety of the contemporary Polish language, functioning within the federative set of varieties (a concept invented by Stanisław Gajda). However, I assumed that a language variety thus understood was open in nature, which means the absence of a specialised set of stylistic devices. At the same time, the tendency to borrow devices from the resources of other stylistic varieties of Polish could be observed. The studies conducted by many linguists prove that there are no limitations on the directions of exploration. In other words - every stylistic (language) variety can provide the author of a press release with the necessary means of expression⁸. This guarantees journalists the freedom to choose their means of expression, set the rules for using those means and enrich the inventory of linguistic forms⁹.

In order to be able to apply the category of style to press releases, while having regard to their dynamics of change, the category needs to be reinterpreted once again¹⁰. I took the view that a style is a flexible and polymorphic category and, by determining the successive degrees of concretisation, I identified the following styles: style of press texts (genres) as the most abstract phenomenon; style of a specific genre of press publications; style of a genre variety (or more concrete variations of a genre), style of a specific release containing the signs

⁶ M. Wojtak, *Przejawy sztuki stylizatorskiej w artykułach z prasy wyspecjalizowanej* [Manifestations of stylistic craftsmanship in specialised press articles], “Poznańskie Spotkania Językoznawcze” [Poznań linguistic meetings] 2004, vol. 13, pp. 179–188; idem, *Stylistyczne ukształtowanie gatunków prasowych* [Stylistic form of press genres], op. cit., pp. 145–159.

⁷ Since I took into account the genre-related contexts, I also used the expression “stylistic form of press genres” and made references to the metaphor of stylistic melting pot, suggested by Stasław Gajda (see *Media – stylowy tygiel...*, op. cit., p. 20), pointing out that the mixing of various stylistic elements in the press is not accidental, although journalists put in a lot of effort to create the impression of freedom of choice of stylistic devices and unlimited innovativeness. See M. Wojtak, *Rozłożone gazety...*, op. cit., pp. 160–133.

⁸ M.T. Liziśowa, *Style funkcjonalne...*, op. cit.; M. Wojtak, *Głosy z teraźniejszości. O języku współczesnej polskiej prasy* [Voices of the present. On the language of contemporary Polish press], Lublin 2010.

⁹ See M. Wojtak, *Rozłożone gazety. Studia z zakresu prasowego dyskursu, języka i stylu* [The spread newspapers. Studies on press discourse, language and style], Lublin 2015, pp. 8–9.

¹⁰ I think those issues are worth returning to, since the stylistic perspective was omitted in the concept of media linguistics presented by Bogusław Skowronek in his monograph *Mediolingwistyka. Wprowadzenie* [Media linguistics. An introduction], Kraków 2013, p. 252. In his synthetic presentation of the connections between that discipline and linguistics, the author mentions cultural linguistics, cognitivism, pragma linguistics and sociolinguistics.

of genre identity which are clear to the recipient¹¹. At the level of features, i.e. extralinguistic markers, the style acquires an antinomic character, which is related to the clash of various perspectives in the approach to shaping the world-view. The syncretism of features corresponds to the heterogeneity of the selected (or created) devices.

Thus, I saw the style of press genres as a set of syncretic features (due to the scope of genre paradoxes, and the richness of relations between genres which, as I have demonstrated, form a continuum). An analysis of the rich set of press publications led to the identification of the following antinomic sequences: 1) conventionality; unconventional conventionality; conventional unconventionality; unconventionality; 2) objectivity; subjectivised objectivity; objectivised subjectivity; subjectivity; 3) monologicality, monological dialogicality; dialogical monologicality; dialogicality; 4) colloquiality, formalised colloquiality, colloquialised formality, formality¹².

In my opinion, the configuration of syncretic features can be paired with a set of exponents (devices), which does not mean that they cannot be found outside press publications¹³. While interpreting the style of press releases (genres) as a descriptive category, I did not present the differential features (I did not seek to distinguish them). Drawing attention to the openness of this style, I emphasised the role of genre normalisations and interplays between the tradition and convention on the one hand, and the ostentatiously manifested editorial freedom on the other hand¹⁴. When reinterpreting the category of style, I broke up with the tradition of differential descriptions and decided not to highlight the relationships with other functional styles. Rather, I perceived style as a polymorphic category that is primarily associated with genre differentiation of the press. This approach allowed me both to densify the conceptual grid depicting the above-mentioned styles (as configurations of features), and to search for increasingly specialised devices aimed at highlighting those features.

¹¹ M. Wojtak, *Gatunki prasowe* [Press genres], Lublin 2004, pp. 311–314; idem, *Stylistyczne ukształtowanie gatunków prasowych...*, op. cit., pp. 180–181; idem, *Rozłożone gazety...*, op. cit., p. 47.

¹² See M. Wojtak, *Gatunki prasowe*, op. cit., p. 313; idem, *Rozłożone gazety...*, op. cit., p. 9. In the article devoted to automotive press, entitled *Przejawy sztuki stylizatorskiej...* (p. 179), I wrote: “I treat this publication as a contribution to the research on the publicistic-journalistic style, although I do not limit my reflections to stylistic devices or a set of features. The publicistic style, like the artistic style, belongs to open styles, which means, firstly, that its markers form antinomic pairs: spontaneity alongside formality, concreteness alongside abstractness, vividness and expressiveness alongside neutralised manner of expression, creativity alongside conventionality, colloquiality alongside expertise, etc., and, secondly, that stylistic devices constitute a heterogenic set, and it is not so much their genesis, but rather their function that matters in specific texts”.

¹³ M. Wojtak, *Rozłożone gazety...*, op. cit., p. 61.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

At the level of genre models, I interpreted features as the resultant of the model's polymorphism, expressing the conviction that the genre code provides here the clearest background for the stylistic configurations that come into being as a result of structural rules, way of presenting the world, pragmatic entanglement and choices offered by the language itself (I call this phenomenon the genesis of the devices used).

To illustrate my line of thinking about style in the context of analysis of press releases, I will refer to the findings concerning the stylistic form of press mentions, i.e. press releases which primarily fulfil the function of informing about an individual fact or event¹⁵. Press mentions with an informational dominant are characterised by conventionality (due to the permanent structural pattern and the presence of formulas), commitment to precision of expression, brevity, matter-of-factness, relevance in the choice of lexis and syntactic structures (they are dominated by colloquial vocabulary representing the neutral register and /or professional vocabulary known to the general public). Conventional unconventionality appears in those press mentions which pursue alternation models (less frequently adaptation models). Those are multi-voiced releases with visible stylistic tensions which should be interpreted as the resultant of the clash between different perspectives on the presented reality. In this type of releases, recognisable exponents acquire objectivised subjectivity and monological dialogicality. Colloquiality, formalised colloquiality, colloquialised formality and colloquiality can be clearly distinguished (especially in a specific text). It all depends on the quality of the so-called admitted voices which the journalists decides to quote in the short text¹⁶. Moreover, an examination of individual releases reveals individual styles of expression, which is connected with the fact that a press mention enables presenting a specific point of view on the described facts¹⁷.

Those issues are far more pronounced in the analyses of more complex press genres, since it is easier to show the processes of densification of stylistic features and concretisation of their exponents¹⁸.

I returned to the issue of style of press releases on several occasions, placing it in new interpretative contexts, i.e. confronting it with the notions of communication and discourse, which will be demonstrated in more detail in further sections of my article.

¹⁵ M. Wojtak, *Gatunki prasowe*, op. cit., pp. 39–55; idem, *Analiza gatunków prasowych. Podręcznik dla studentów dziennikarstwa i kierunków pokrewnych* [An analysis of press genres. A course book for students of journalism and related fields], Lublin 2008, pp. 39–46.

¹⁶ M. Wojtak, *Gatunki prasowe*, op. cit., pp. 46–51.

¹⁷ See M. Wojtak, *Analiza gatunków prasowych...*, op. cit., pp. 43–44.

¹⁸ M. Wojtak, *Przejawy sztuki stylizatorskiej...*, op. cit., pp. 179–188.

Communicative perspective in the analysis of press releases

When speaking of media (including, of course, the press), one can view (although this is not the only possible approach) communication as a process of transmission of information, or as an interaction¹⁹. The form of communication thus defined is determined by the following parameters: who communicates with whom (sources, senders, recipients), why and how does the communication take place (functions, intentions, channels, languages, code), what is the object of communication, and what are its (intended or unintended) consequences²⁰.

Communication with an informational dominant has considerably changed over the years, which is the result of combining information with interpretation, subjective selection of information or combining information with entertainment. New phenomena in the Polish media include talking about oneself, i.e. a sort of self-thematism and placing emphasis on the phatic function²¹.

Another new phenomenon in the 1990s, now well-established, was the role and status of communication with an interactive dominant²². I identified the following detailed models within that model of communication:

1. Communication characterised by egalitarianism: journalists speak to everybody, or rather communicate with an average reader.
2. Communication characterised by elitarianism in the following specific implementations:
 - a) journalists speak to selected, educated, sophisticated and culturally refined recipients,
 - b) journalists adopt a specific perspective to address specific recipients,
 - c) journalists implement a model of interaction contained in the formula: people speak to those who are one of them, enthusiasts communicate with enthusiasts.

This model of communication is connected with various games played with the reader, i.e. fulfilling the reader's predictable expectations, surprising and puzzling the reader,

¹⁹ See T. Goban-Klas, *Proces komunikowania masowego* [The process of mass communication] [in:] *Dziennikarstwo i świat mediów* [Journalism and world of the media], eds. Z. Bauer, E. Chudziński, Kraków 1996, pp. 238–249; M. Wojtak, "Wysoki współczynnik czadu", czyli o słownictwie w prasie specjalistycznej – na wybranych przykładach ["A high level of hype", or on the vocabulary in specialised press, based on selected examples], [in:] *Słownictwo współczesnej polszczyzny w okresie przemian* [Vocabulary of contemporary Polish during the period of transformation], ed. J. Mazur, Lublin 2000, p. 117.

²⁰ T. Goban-Klas, *Proces komunikowania masowego*, op. cit., p. 239; M. Wojtak, "Wysoki współczynnik czadu"..., op. cit., pp. 117–118.

²¹ G. Majkowska, H. Satkiewicz, *Język w mediach* [Language in the media] [in:] *Polszczyzna 2000. Orędzie o stanie języka na przełomie tysiącleci* [The Polish language 2000. An address on the state of the language at the turn of the millennium], ed. W. Pisarek, Kraków 1999, p. 193; B. Skowronek, *Mediolingwistyka...*, op. cit., p. 143.

²² M. Wojtak, "Wysoki współczynnik czadu"..., op. cit., p. 240; idem, *Przejawy mody w sposobie kształtowania informacyjnych gatunków prasowych* [Manifestations of fashion in the shaping of informational press genres] [in:] *Moda jako problem lingwistyczny* [Fashion as a linguistic problem], ed. K. Wojtczuk, Siedlce 2000, p. 36; idem, *Rozłożone gazety...*, op. cit., pp. 10–11.

attracting his attention, reinterpreting the world, persuasion, the desire to enchant the reader with an original and beautiful manner of expression, and other tricks. Those trends are most clearly visible in the way titles are styled (type 2a communication). Putting emphasis on those trends fosters certain stylistic experiments in various types of specialised press. One cannot fail to notice the conceptism of the press, i.e. attempts to surprise the reader with the form of the message, which also includes the style. However, experiments in this regard are not accidental. Stylistic choices are accompanied (or conditioned) by a certain manner in which the presented world is perceived.

When analysing the automotive press from this angle (type 2c communication), I described the different conceits (both the cognitive and purely stylistic ones) related to the brand names of presented vehicles. Thus, for example, the description of Honda Jazz (“Auto Świat” magazine, 2002, 6) contained references to musical decorum by accumulating terminology with various degrees of concreteness and professional specialisation²³: strike a chord, set the rhythm, syncopate, play, jazz drum set, concert hall, musician, jazz music piece, sound of a music piece, applause from the audience, entry to a jamboree concert”. When extracted from the context, the terms do not reflect the scale of incoherence of the images that the author is trying to create. The aim of the quoted lexemes was to present the car and the activities of car manufacturers by means of musical terms. Some of the images built in this way are effective and creative: “They are among the world’s best Chopinists. But not much can be said about the Japanese talent for jazz. However, they can set the correct rhythm, add the right tones and syncopate: [...]”. When placed in the context, the image no longer impresses with its creativity: “a few more litres of boot space, a few additional centimetres of room above the head - they can clearly play the minibus keyboard in a virtuosic style”. Alongside suggestive and picturesque fragments, skilfully connecting the two essentially disparate realities (the sphere of music and the automotive sphere), and alongside witty fragments, the text also contains passages which are semantically incoherent²⁴. The desire to surprise the reader and dazzle him with unusual associations, so typical of conceptism, takes precedence over precision and elegance of expression.

While appreciating the author’s concern for the style of the text (the efforts to achieve an original manner of expression), in my conclusions I was quite critical about those experiments. The main method of deploying stylistic tricks in specialised press is the metaphorical conceptualisation of a specific component of the presented reality (a car is a

²³ M. Wojtak, *Przejawy sztuki stylizatorskiej...*, op. cit., pp. 185-186.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 186.

living being, a car is a human being, a car is a woman). However, the incompatibility which is typical of a conceit often leads to incoherence which overshadows the author's intentions and weakens the precision of expression. This is because journalists have not mastered the art of using antithesis, paradox, or ellipsis i.e. the modifications of the semantics of a text which are typical of a conceit and lead to the discovery of new truths about the presented and evaluated world. However, the stylistic experiments proposed by them reinforce the antinomy of features of the publicistic-journalistic style and the heterogeneity of its exponents²⁵.

The presented model of communicating with the readers is continuously growing richer and more diverse. When analysing women's and youth press, I came across further experiments which influenced the stylistic form of the published texts.

The manner of communication is changing due to the fact that journalists speak with their own voice, which means that a newspaper is dominated by journalistic statements, and the readers' voice has the traditional form of letters to the editor (or other forms of contact, whether disclosed or hidden). However, foreign voices are also increasingly present (in the communication model with an interactive dominant) which results in the traditionally journalistic genres becoming open to modifications, whether real or faked, by the readers. Journalists create a community with readers by allowing them to enter their communication field, turning them into senders of publicistic statements.

In general press, communication with an interactive dominant primarily means activating the reader by means of several techniques of formulating press releases²⁶:

- highlighting the dialogicality of a message by introducing targeted statements (this usually involves certain modifications of the genre models)
- emphasising the dramatic character of a message which contains clashing arguments and points of view, without suggesting ready-made solutions
- recognising the superiority of the attractiveness of a message over its communicativeness.

In women's press, contamination of two detailed models of interactive communication can be noticed (2b and 2c, i.e. communication with selected recipients and with the audience which falls into the category of "one of us"). One can see here clear references to the communication style typical of person-to-person contacts, sender-recipient relationships acquire the appearance of subjective references, one can detect the attempts to activate the recipients by means of techniques typical of general press, and the efforts to build the

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 188; idem, *Rozłożone gazety...*, op. cit. pp. 92–93.

²⁶ M. Wojtak, *Przejawy mody...*, op. cit., p. 39; idem, *Rozłożone gazety...*, op. cit., p. 68.

community with a specific group of readers. At the same time, all texts acquire the form of utterances directed at somebody, they are dialogue-oriented, which suggests directness and spontaneity of communication typical of colloquial dialogues.

Another trick is the use of epistolary style. This involves the use of graphic, grammatical and textual devices. New stylistic phenomena, and new stylistic qualities are created, which cannot be reduced to fashion for colloquiality. Journalists emerge as people engaged in interaction, people who construct a common world with the recipients, which is created from the point of view of the recipients, taking into account their everyday perceptions and experiences; in accordance with the recipients' expectations (cf.: the scope of issues addressed); with the recipients' participation (often faked); using linguistic means known to the recipients, mostly colloquial ones. Editorial staff present themselves as friends, confidants, advisers. They declare their readiness to solve everyday problems, add an extraordinary flavour to ordinary life. Consequently, all stylistic resources acquire a semantic motivation, since constructing a common reality with the readers means searching for an appropriate style of expression²⁷.

The interactive method of communication determines the modifications of the genres of texts, i.e. the texts are given the form of suggestive and picturesque messages which imitate colloquial (or environmental) interactions only to a certain degree. The genre filter formed on the basis of omnipotent conceptism (a peculiar, unique manner of expression) results in a situation where the function of the devices used in a text is more important than their origin. It might be said that all stylistic choices are subordinated to the rules of the games played with the readers. The games do not simply mean entertainment, but rather represent a form of hidden, strong didactics that predicts the needs of the recipients and prescribes the means of satisfying those needs. A newspaper which represents itself as a friend cannot be suspected of manipulation²⁸.

From a communicative perspective, the form of press releases (their style) can be perceived as a phenomenon that is homogeneous with the interactive style of communication which seeks to build a common world with the recipients. This thought is only a step away from the discursive perspective.

²⁷ I noticed and described similar trends in youth press. See M. Wojtak, *Rozłożone gazety...*, op. cit., pp. 123–133. For a more detailed discussion of those issues, including a substantial broadening of analytical perspectives, see: M. Ślawska, *Formy dialogu w gatunkach prasowych* [Forms of dialogue in press genres], Katowice 2014.

²⁸ M. Wojtak, *Rozłożone gazety...*, op. cit., pp. 123–133.

Discursive perspective in the description of the stylistic form of press releases²⁹

The existing multi-thematic discussion regarding the difficulties of defining the discourse, searching for its essence and determining the principles for discourse analysis includes certain recurrent themes. Let us try to concentrate on those themes by referring to those works which present and discuss various definitions³⁰. First, let us notice that the definitions which constitute van Dijk's canon are not mutually contradictory. The researcher, who is a recognised authority in our field of interest, points out that discourse can be precisely defined in three basic ways: a) as a way of using the language; b) as a communicative event, which is also related to transmission of ideas; c) as a form of interaction³¹. Each of those clarifications contains similar parameters of discourse which are, however, arranged in a separate (peculiar) configuration. Whether discourse is understood as the use of language (including the question of who, when, how and why is using the language), or as a communicative event (which takes into account the discourse participants, their attitudes, communication goals, world-views, sense of cultural community), or as interaction, it essentially represents a method of organising human activity, including also communicative practice of a specific society (community) which, in the course of various interactions, determines and agrees on matters important to them, preserves the appropriate scenarios of communicative behaviours and the rules for implementing those scenarios using utterances (and/ or non-verbal means).

Thus, one can view discourse as a full range of communicative practices typical of a specific community, and distinguish a discourse community that is composed of “the

²⁹ The fragment was prepared on the basis of my previous papers. See M. Wojtak, *Dyskurs religijny w mediach. Próba rekonesansu* [Religious discourse in the media. An attempt at reconnaissance] [in:] *Dyskurs religijny w mediach* [Religious discourse in the media], ed. D. Zdunkiewicz-Jedynak, Tarnów 2010, pp. 7–30; idem, *Styl dziennikarstwa prasowego w perspektywie dyskursywnej* [The style of press journalism in a discursive perspective] [in:] *Styl –dyskurs – media* [Style-discourse-media], eds. B. Bogołębska, M. Worsowicz, Łódź 2010, pp. 81–91; idem, *Gatunki prasowe w dyskursywnym zakorzenieniu* [Press genres rooted in discourse] [in:] *Tekst – gatunek – dyskurs na przełomie XX i XXI wieku* [Text - genre - discourse in the late 20th and early 21st century], ed. J. Szadura, Lublin 2012, pp. 9–26.

³⁰ A. Duszak, *Tekst, dyskurs, komunikacja międzykulturowa* [Text, discourse, intercultural communication], Warszawa 1998; E. Miczka, *Kognitywne struktury sytuacyjne i informacyjne w interpretacji dyskursu* [Cognitive situational and informational structures in discourse interpretation], Katowice 2002, pp. 40–42; S. Gajda, *Nowe społeczności dyskursywne a edukacja komunikacyjna* [New discourse communities and communication education] [in:] *Zmiany w publicznych zwyczajach językowych* [Changes in public linguistic habits], eds. J. Bralczyk, K. Mosiołek-Kłosińska, Warszawa 2001, p. 8. Bilut-Homplewicz, *Tautonomia terminologiczna? Kilka uwag o użyciu terminów Dyskurs i dyskurs w językoznawstwie niemieckim i polskim* [Terminological tautonymy? Some remarks on the use of terms “diskurs” and “dyskurs” in German and Polish linguistics], “Słowo. Studia Językoznawcze” [The word. Linguistic studies] 2010, no. 1, pp. 21–33; ibidem, M. Pikor-Niedziałek, *Dyskursy we współczesnym językoznawstwie anglojęzycznym* [Discourse in contemporary English language linguistics], pp. 50–56.

³¹ T.A. van Dijk, *Badania nad dyskursem* [The study of discourse] [in:] *Dyskurs jako struktura i proces* [Discourse as structure and process], ed. T.A. van Dijk, translated into Polish by G. Grochowski, Warszawa 2001, p. 10.

participants of co-activity and co-communication in a specific sphere of human behaviours”³². It is also important to note here the distinction made by Gajda. The researcher warns against equating a communicative community with a discourse community. He writes that “the latter is concerned with constructing an own social world whose core is the ideological and cultural community built upon a specific world-view”³³. It can therefore be assumed that a community which lies within the sphere of media influence is rather a communicative community, although it may create specialised discourse communities, both on the part of the senders and the recipients.

Discourse should be interpreted as a multidimensional, dynamic object. It is therefore not surprising that the set of discourse parameters is described in a variety of ways³⁴. I think that in a general presentation like this one it is useful to mention the suggestion concerning the distinction between a) discourse as a model (which involves general guidelines regarding the ideological framework, general message of communication, cultural determinants, features of the participants of a communicative act, typical spatial and temporal location), b) discourse as a specific communicative event³⁵. At both those levels, either the full spectrum of discourse parameters, or the selected aspects can be described. In the context of media research, the starting point for the analysis is also not without significance. The analysis may cover: the discourse of particular media genres³⁶, the discourse of specific media, the discourse related to a specific topic in the media, or media discourse tout *court*³⁷.

Both at the level of general organisation of discourse (in a model) and at the level of a context-embedded text, the following discourse parameters can be identified: a) thematic area (global and fragmentary topics and the manner of presentation), b) ontological area (the relationship between the world of discourse and reality, i.e. the reflected world or an image of the world), c) functional area (dominant illocutions i.e. communication goals), d) area of utterances (relations between the sender and the recipient, time and place of communication),

³² S. Gajda, *Nowe społeczności dyskursywne...* [New discourse communities...], op. cit., p. 8.

³³ Ibidem, p. 8.

³⁴ See U. Żydek-Bednarczuk, *Dyskurs medialny* [Media discourse] [in:] *Przewodnik po stylistyce polskiej. Style współczesnej polszczyzny* [A guide to Polish stylistics. The styles of contemporary Polish], eds. E. Malinowska, J. Nocoń, U. Żydek-Bednarczuk, Kraków 2013, pp. 179–197; B. Skowronek, *Mediolingwistyka...* [Media linguistics], op. cit., pp. 106–111.

³⁵ E. Miczka, *Kognitywne struktury sytuacyjne...* [Cognitive situational structures...], op. cit., pp. 93–95.

³⁶ T. Piekot, *Dyskurs wiadomości dziennikarskich a procesy modelujące komunikację publiczną po roku 1989* [The discourse of press releases and the processes shaping public communication after 1989], [in:] *Współczesna analiza dyskursu. Kognitywna analiza dyskursu a inne metody badawcze* [Contemporary discourse analyses. A cognitive analysis of discourse and other research methods], eds. M. Krauz, S. Gajda, Rzeszów 2005, pp. 193 - 202.

³⁷ M. Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Dyskurs* [Discourse] [in:] *Słownik terminologii medialnej* [Dictionary of media terminology], ed. W. Pisarek, Kraków 2006, p. 41.

e) axiological area (the adopted system of values and the contested system of values), f) area of genre conventions³⁸.

At the level of a model, media discourse *tout court* would be a polythematic discourse with certain preferences determined by the multidimensional diversity of the media, with a peculiar vision of the world subordinated to the categories of description borrowed from the world of entertainment, trivialised, based on specific rules of selection and interpretation of the included components of the world (cf. the kaleidoscope metaphor suggested by Mrozowski)³⁹, with an antinomic set of dominant goals, the most important of them being to attract the recipients' attention, satisfy their expectations and impose on them one's own vision of the world, with the attempts to overcome the limitations of mass communication and transform the contact with recipients into "face to face" communication (cf. interactive communication style), with an axiological system which favours hedonistic (vital) values, with a set of genres which enable the dynamic profiling of those parameters at the level of performance, i.e. with diverse forms of messages (genres and their realisations).

Media discourse is internally prismatically varied. As is well known, media fulfil different roles – in line with the senders' intentions and the actual or imaginary needs of the recipients. They function simultaneously as ordinary transmitters, as ideologically driven institutions organising the social life, and as culturally defined co-creators of human behaviours, ways of thinking and valuing the world.

Press discourse is one of the manifestations (modes) of existence of media discourse and, as such, it shares a wide spectrum of features with media discourse, while also retaining its own, specific features.

The set of press discourse features constitutes, in my opinion, an antinomic system, which has important implications for the style⁴⁰.

On the one hand, multi-level and multidimensional differentiation of the press can be observed and, on the other hand, there are numerous manifestations of homogenisation.

This differentiation applies to both general (polythematic) and specialised press which vary: in terms of territorial scope (national, regional or local press - to mention only the basic parameters of differentiation), in terms of the problems addressed (e.g.: hobby or religious press), in terms of the manner of handling the topic (opinion-forming and popular press). The polymorphism of contemporary (even traditional) press is a phenomenon that is difficult to

³⁸ E. Miczka, *Kognitywne struktury sytuacyjne...* [Cognitive situational structures...], op. cit., pp. 104-107.

³⁹ M. Mrozowski, *Media masowe. Władza, rozrywka i biznes* [Mass media. Power, entertainment and business], Warszawa 2001.

⁴⁰ M. Wojtak, *Gatunki prasowe*, op. cit., pp. 311–314; idem, *Przejawy kunsztu stylizatorskiego...*, op. cit., p. 179.

codify into rules. The scopes and planes of differentiation intersect, overlap and penetrate one another. There is no isomorphism between those divisions (divisions based on discourse) and the principles of choice and selection of stylistic devices.

Homogenisation at the discourse level has paradoxical frames defined by the phenomenon of *infotainment* which includes the following processes: 1) fragmentation (presenting events as phenomena detached from the social context), 2) concretisation (events as a combination of actions that can be interpreted without referring to models), 3) personalisation (emphasizing emotions as the causative factors behind actions), 4) sensationism (emphasizing the shocking constituents of events)⁴¹. It is therefore valid to say that media in general, and especially press, are currently dominated by the poetics of oxymoron.

Press discourse is both monothematic (in selected magazines with a specific profile) and polythematic (not only in general or opinion-forming magazines). The ontological area of discourse is mediated and created in a manner that is typical of media. The configuration of functions remains essentially constant (information, interpretation, accumulation of knowledge, mobilisation and entertainment), their arrangement changes in particular types of the press (or even in a given newspaper or magazine), the manner of expressing those functions is guided by the principle of syncretism. The sending-receiving relationships become reciprocal, partner relationships, although this is often a discursive game used by the press. One of the components of this game are the tricks enabling the modification of such situational parameters as time and place. The interactive style of communication (mentioned above) involves suggesting scenarios which are typical of direct communication taking place here and now, based on a conversation and hence also personalised. The axiological area of discourse is rich and variable. It is dominated, as I said before, by hedonism and entertainment, although it is not devoid of sublime values. The manner in which they are presented, especially the manner of presenting anti-values, is extremely dynamic.

Genre conventions create a variable configuration, but we are not merely dealing with a mixture of qualities. There are newspapers and magazines in the market where the genre make-up is similar to the classic genre composition that respects the distinction between information and publicistic commentary. However, there is an increasing trend in the press to shade the conventions, create numerous genre varieties, emphasize alterations or genre borrowings. Genre reductionism is also an important phenomenon here. It is typical of

⁴¹ M. Mrozowski, *Media masowe...*, op. cit., p. 254.

specialised press and involves omitting selected forms of publicistic texts (e.g. columns or reviews), introducing own forms of expression (cf. for example tests in hobby press or collage texts), and changing the hierarchy of genres (cf. enhancing the importance of announcements)⁴².

To be able to speak about the style of press messages in a new manner, I assume that press discourse is absorptive. It is multidirectionally open to other discourses and absorbs those discourses, turning them into an object of presentation and, consequently, also into a source of themes, message forms and linguistic devices. Looking at the media, including the press, one cannot fail to notice the multitude of communication filters and the variability of their configurations involved in a communicative event (a detailed discourse), such as a specific issue of a newspaper, or a specific publication.

This, however, does not preclude the hypothesis that absorption in the press essentially takes place in two ways. One of them is the quotational absorption which occurs when a newspaper functions as a medium and a transmitter, thus becoming a form of presenting discourse X (or its selected components). The press, as is known, facilitates the contact with various discourses. This type of absorption preserves the identity of discourse X in all its aspects (thematic, ontological and functional, etc.), although the scopes of the presentation are variable. The first manifestation of this type of absorption is the reproduction of the components of discourse X as independent messages. Another manifestation is the quotation of specific components of a foreign discourse as part of a press release, in the form of “admitted voices”. I have described the other type of absorption as interpretative, since discourse X does not retain its full autonomy and becomes significantly transformed by the press. The thematic aspect is profiled by the media, and the detailed topics are selected and presented in a specific perspective. The basic intentions typical of media discourse are preserved, and it is only into those intentions that the intentions of discourse X are inscribed. Often, they are simply communicated by naming the illocutions of the subject of discourse X. They are, however, also modified, presented in the form of entertainment or reinterpreted in a different way. In this case, genre usually becomes the communication filter. The arrangements of the different components of the absorbed discourse undergo changes in the media kaleidoscope. At the level of specific communicative events, the presented types of absorption may accumulate - in accordance with genre conventions, or against those conventions.

⁴² M. Wojtak, *Gatunki mowy charakterystyczne dla prasy motoryzacyjnej* [Speech genres typical of automotive press], „Prace Językoznawcze” [Papers in linguistics] 2006, vol. VIII, pp. 61–77.

If we examine those phenomena in terms of results, press discourse will emerge as a discourse that is woven from quotations or transformations of other discourses. Within press discourse, a set of discourses X and discourses about X can be identified. Some of the examples are: politics discourse and discourse about politics, religion discourse and discourse about religion, business discourse (often through a mediated legal filter) and discourse about business, science discourse (usually in the popularising version) and discourse about science, literature discourse (more broadly culture discourse) and discourse about literature. It is hard to map those phenomena. Therefore, I will confine myself to the presented list, while pointing out the above-mentioned discourses exert mutual influences on one another. The media discourse that is woven from other discourses changes at its own pace, while taking into account the pace of changes of other discourses. It is therefore characterised by transgressiveness resulting from the opening of the borders of the discourse itself (which is connected with absorption and expansion to other discursive areas), and the borders of other aspects (planes) of discourse.

The foregoing interpretative findings can be regarded as the phenomena which stimulate the polymorphism and openness of the style of press releases that is the antinomy of features and heterogeneity of devices⁴³. The interpretative power of this hypothesis becomes weaker if we do not take into account the strategies of discourse, i.e. the rules of communication, including the rules of constructing utterances, shaping their illocutionary potential, sending-receiving relationships and world-views. Contemporary media researchers unanimously emphasise that media are oriented towards the recipient, including granting him the right to co-create the discourse, this right being real in certain areas (cf. editorial mail in traditional press), although most often faked (cf. the remarks on the interactive style of communication).

In prismatically shaped press releases, i.e. at the level of communicative concreteness, the degree of mediation and the number of communication filters increases. Basically, all press genres are becoming polyphonic, and the principle of juxtaposing various points of view and mixing the styles of expression has exceeded the limits of publicistic writing, as well as those areas of press communication which employed editorial practices described as the phenomenon of genre reductionism.

When analysing discourse and style at an abstract (model) level, those communicative phenomena can be viewed as mutually illuminating one another. In the mirror of media

⁴³ M. Wojtak, *Stylistyczne ukształtowanie gatunków prasowych...*, op. cit., p. 146.

discourse (press discourse: dynamic, open, absorptive), the style of communicative releases assumes an antinomic shape. Press discourse is, on the other hand, characterised by thematic and functional accumulation (condensation) (this is the case with serious publicistic writings focused on socially important issues, interpretative journalism characterised by the distinctness of genres and stylistic relevance) and, on the other hand, by dispersion, dilution of an important content in a trivial form, or by concentration on problems which are essentially insignificant, but whose importance is artificially inflated. This regularity may be the source of the features of style which form antinomic pairs: spontaneity/formality, concreteness/abstractness, neutrality/expressiveness, creativity/conventionality, colloquiality/expertise, colloquiality/formality, etc. Those features undergo polarisation due to the functioning of successive communication filters (especially genre filters) in discourse. At the level of genres, those features become syncretic markers⁴⁴. The exponents of those features come from many sources and can be contextually modified in specific texts (see the section “Press releases in a stylistic perspective”).

Stylistic syncretism should be viewed as a feature of press discourse at the level of a model. Specific communicative events do not always display new qualities created by mixing various components. In many genres and their realisations, the focus is on bringing out the contrasts by juxtaposing various points of view in a message. A certain novelty (not only in specialised press) is the decomposition of a press release, giving it the shape of a collage (multi-style) in order to assign the recipient the role of the entity that unifies the message. In general press, this is done by creating collections of articles, and introducing pull-quotes⁴⁵, in a specialised press - by giving a press release the shape of a mosaic.

The paradox of communicative fission is visible at the lowest level of discourse (and style) concretisation that is in a cycle of publications devoted to one issue (often brought up by the media). It is characterised by polyphony resulting from the use of the mechanism of communicative substitution (a press release is woven from the messages expressed by various subjects). When analysed in a discursive perspective, a press releases emerge as stylistic patchworks made up of both basic components (cited through absorptive discourse) and transformed ones.

⁴⁴ M. Wojtak, *Gatunki prasowe*, op. cit., pp. 311-313; idem, “Stylistyczne ukształtowanie...”, op. cit., p. 157.

⁴⁵ See M. Wojtak, *Analiza gatunków prasowych...*, op. cit., pp. 31-32.

Final remarks

I understand the style of press releases, which has been subjected to several reinterpretations (excluding nominal disputes), to be an abstract phenomenon representing the resultant of the rich set of forms of expressions (including polysemiotic messages) functioning in the world of the press (media) and shaped accordingly by that world. The category is co-created, firstly, by the ideas of the authors (and also operators of the media) concerning the proper (and, above all, effective) communication via media, and secondly by the recipients' expectations arising from the interactive practice understood both as a process of assigning meanings and negotiating those meanings in specially shaped or copied communicative scenarios.

Taking the role of a philologist-observer, I perceive the style of communication via press as a polymorphic, capacious and open category. At the level of features, the style is co-created by antinomic and syncretic phenomena, due to the lack of a single point of view on depicted reality, lack of a single cognitive plane, a single type of rationality or standardised axiology. It is not easy to describe the category of style thus defined, since it is possible to ascribe sets of linguistic devices (from various levels of system organisation) to isolated features, but the adequacy of such a descriptive process will be weakened by the omission of the important communication filter, i.e. the writing genres.

By focusing the research interest on the level of genres, it is possible, thanks to taking into account the multidimensional structure, to construct a very thick grid of features and enrich the sets of stylistic exponents. The genre filter enables an in-depth and multifaceted analysis and interpretation of the style of particular press releases, permits us to discern the tension between conventionality and innovativeness, monitor the strategies preferred by the authors, watch the games played with the recipients (satisfying their needs, preserving their habits, surprising, puzzling or seducing them by juggling with information, persuasion or imposing opinions). The category of discourse, and especially the notion of absorption, allows the style of press releases to be described as a peculiar phenomenon because of the isomorphic vision of the world and its formal presentations.