

# Factualization in Media Discourse: Reflection and Transformation of Actuality

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## ABSTRACT

Factualization is considered as a cognitive mechanism that ensures the transformation of an actual fact into a fact of human consciousness. The research is studying the factualization performed through the media reality that is filled with actual facts interpreted and represented in the form of media facts. The relevance of our study is that the modern man’s worldview includes true, values-sensitive and false pieces of information, each of them equally determining the man’s behavior. The purpose of the work proposed is to identify the types of factualization and give them linguistically relevant characteristics, taking into account the specificity of the media discourse. There have been identified three types of factualization in the media discourse, i.e., the reflection of objective actuality; adaptation of actuality to the people’s values in order to create conditions for the successful impact on their worldviews; and distortion of actuality, its function is any linguistic manipulation and entertainment. The reflection and adaptation as types of factualization provide a link between actuality and its representation in the media. The media facts—reflections and adaptations—possess identified referents in actuality, and therefore are able to be verified, that is, evaluated with respect to the veracity of their representation. The third factualization type, distortion, generates a fragment of the media reality that does not have an original in real life.

**Keywords:** *factualization, media discourse, media fact, media reality, types of factualization*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Russian linguists are considered to be focused on the structure and pragmatics of the media discourse [1; 2]. The issue of media representation of actuality has been addressed in their investigations for about recent 15 years. In cognitive psychology of discourse processing, a discourse is understood as a function of socially shared attitudes, ideologies, norms, values, and other forms of 'social cognition' [3]. In other words, a discourse reflects a certain type of social activity of a person who is intended to construct a special reality, using a detailed description. A discourse is also part of the communication process characterized by participants, specific conditions, and purposes [4]. This approach focuses on the speaker’s active role in creating relevant content, correlating with extralinguistic reality presented in the discourse and considers the specific character of a person-dependent representation.

The lack of objectivity in media reality is explained by the lack of the referent’s availability or the lack of the referent itself [3; 5; 6]. For a recipient, non-availability of verification and its absence seem to be compatible concepts. Therefore, if knowledge is considered a valid opinion [7], and any opinion or assertion is presented as a justified one, then opinion’s claims on the status of a fact are considered acceptable.

The ability of human thinking to produce and internalize media information has identified two existence forms of a media worldview, i.e., a sign worldview in the form of media texts resulted from production of media text and a mental worldview resulted from interiorization of their meanings. So, firstly, the media worldview is a model of the media reality formed in mind of an individual recipient as a result of the information activities of the media, and is a specific component of the individual worldview, and, secondly, the media worldview is a special type of the media reality [8]. Therefore, studying texts of the media discourse, we study both the media worldview and media reality.

The relevance of our study is that an individual worldview includes true, value-based, and false pieces of information; each of them equally determining the man’s behavior. The cognitive mechanism of representing real world in the reality of a particular discourse using facts is factualization. An integrated approach to the issue of discursive representation of assertion in the media discourse from the standpoint of linguistics of discourse, cognitive linguistics, critical linguistics, and rhetoric is also relevant.

The purpose of this article is to substantiate the philological understanding of the phenomenon of factualization, highlight its types and their characteristics, taking into account the specific features of the media discourse.

**2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

General theoretical analysis methods to identify the characteristics of a phenomenon and a categorization method to identify its types were applied in the study. At the previous stage of our research, the method of component analysis of dictionary entries allowed us to study the associative background of the concept of ‘fact’, and the revealed intersections of its Russian and English conceptual spheres confirmed the universality of this concept for Russian and English cultures. There were studied 46 dictionary entries; 28 of them were Russian and 18 English. There were identified 17 semes, correlating with the concepts of ‘fact’ in the individual and collective consciousness [9]. In the proposed work, we relied on the results of this study. In the future, we intend to develop our learning framework to produce richer classes of probabilistic assumption (for example weighted automata as assumptions [39]) and extend it to deal with more expressive types of probabilistic models.

Fact is able to exist in all types of reality. The component analysis of entries in different types of dictionaries—defining, encyclopedic, philosophical, etc.—identified semes associated with fact. We found correlations between these semes and types of reality. The obtained results are presented in Table 1.

**3. RESEARCH RESULTS**

*3.1. Fact as a unit of reality*

The media discourse produces media reality that is a sociocultural phenomenon, where all spheres of public life are represented. Therefore all types of reality are represented in media reality, but are somehow connected with actuality—a true image of the real world in the human mind. A representation involves not only reflection, but also transformation of the original. Actuality is a perceived real world, its reflection; subjective and secondary realities are options for reflected actuality adapted to the value worldviews of individuals and society; possible and fictional realities are distortions of actuality.

**Table 1** Correlation between semes in the word ‘fact’ and types of reality

| <b>Type of reality</b> | <b>Semes in word ‘fact’</b>                                  |
|------------------------|--|
| Real world             | event, phenomenon, action                                    |
| Actuality              | truth, actuality, information, trial, knowledge, objectivity |
| Subjective reality     | experience, belief, situation, circumstance                  |
| Secondary Reality      | statement, proof, evidence                                   |

Seven semes are the same in Russian and English cultures (event, phenomenon, truth, actuality, knowledge, experience, information, and statement); five semes were identified only in English (action, belief, situation, circumstance, and evidence). It is important to note that the scientists who participated in the compilation of the dictionaries recorded not only associations of fact with event, truth, experience and others, corresponding to different types of reality, but also their synonymous use in speech.

The equal use of the words ‘fact’ and ‘event’ is determined as erroneous by linguists [10]. Indeed, being a phenomenon of exclusively mental reality, a fact cannot relate to physical objects. The meanings associated with physical reality are more likely to relate to the actuality of things in conjunction with ideas, social institutions, and generally accepted knowledge and reflection of the actuality—actuality, since in everyday consciousness these types of reality are a single whole and are not customary to be distinguished. Therefore, a fact provides a link between all types of reality.

The transition from one reality to another involves transformation of a fact, which is required by the type of reality. Physical reality or real world is filled with objects and their interactions; objective and subjective realities operate with images, and secondary reality with signs. Consequently, the transformation of a fact in any reality is factualization. In particular, the selection and transfer of facts of real world into facts of media reality we understand as factualization. The reality constructed by the media discourse has a number of characteristics based on true or false factuality. To perform certain manipulation, a media fact is the main tool of a journalist. This conclusion actualizes the need for a detailed examining the nature of factualization and media facts that, depending on the type of factualization, reflect or distort the actuality. The media fact as a unit of perceived media reality and in the future becomes an element of the worldview, individual and collective. Moreover, the media fact we consider an information construct of the media reality, which the recipient of this reality is ready to regard as a fact.

### 3.2. *Factualization: New Rhetoric approach*

In our work, the factualization is considered in the light of a New Rhetoric approach, relevant for the specificity of the media discourse. Factualization is a representation of actuality in the reality of a particular discourse, using facts. It is important to emphasize that facts are constructed according to the laws of a certain discourse reality, and, being transformed, tend to move to a personal reality, providing a stream of information. In this context, the media reality is a space for the emergence of facts that affect the consciousness of the audience.

New Rhetoric as a scientific product of postmodernism sees a single basis for rhetoric, the theory of argumentation and assertion. This is not a search for truth, but the choice of a preferred fact or assertion and voluntary acceptance of the argument, while a speaker needs to force the audience to consent with the fact he presents [6; 11]. The consent as a relevant new rhetoric concept in the analysis of modern media discourse considerably matters in conditions when rational reasons become null and void. Since the truth is replaced by an assertion, the factuality depends on, the consent of the audience with the author can help him ensure the desired effect [11]. The negative side of this trend in media rhetoric is obvious, because “in the information society, much depends on a person’s ability to have a quick and effective impact on the information environment. The commitment to trust an opinion outweighs the desire to understand the situation objectively and ultimately becomes counterproductive for the speaker himself, as it reduces his adaptive capabilities. The need to adapt in the world of opinions and ratings obscures the task of discovering true causal relationships” [12].

The consent can be achieved by persuasion that is achieved with the help of pragmatic communication and is able to change the addressee's attitude to an object, a phenomenon or a situation and modify its general emotional mood and intentions. To achieve this effect, there are two ways, i.e., to make believe and make to understand. In the media discourse, a fact in a text must be plausible enough to be believed in and adapted to the people’s worldviews in order to be understood and finally consented by a recipient.

The factualization results from consent and has sensory and rational principles [13]. The sensual aspect is primary because is based on the perception of events (facts) of actuality or messages about them due to belief and allows saying "I consent because I see/feel". The rational aspect ensures a internalization of a fact and is realized through understanding (“I consent because I understand”). Each of these factors is capable of ensuring a fact formed in the human mind, that is, the factualization. For example, in the mind of a religious person, the events described in the Bible are facts based on belief (faith). Schooling implements factualization based on understanding. Belief and understanding potentiate each other, so understanding religion can strengthen faith, namely, transform the facts of biblical reality into the facts of subjective reality of an ordinary person. Moreover, understanding does not always

ensure factualization. An example is the case when a wife who received an official notification of her husband’s death in the war did not believe in what had happened despite understanding of the documented fact of death. She continued to wait for him (lack of a behavioral reaction to the fact) and spoke of him living (lack of a verbal representation of the factualization of the death report).

### 3.3. *Types of factualization in media discourse*

Constructing a media reality is a process of creating a textual reality that declares itself a representation of actuality. The term ‘text’ is here broadly defined and includes verbal messages, images, audio tracks and their scripts—everything that makes sense in media discourse. This process takes place in cases of reflection, adaptation, and distortion of actuality. However, the degree, the media reality departs from the original—actuality, determines the type of factualization regarded as a process of reflection or distortion of actuality.

The obvious link between the actuality and media reality provides verification of the latter. Successful verification contributes to the implementation of media discourse tasks, such as description, explanation (interpretation), and regulation (constraining or limitation) of the recipients’ activities, impact on the consciousness of recipients (for example, suggestion, change of assessments, and creation of attitudes that facilitate the performance of certain actions), assessment of actuality, forecasting, etc. The tasks, in turn, determine the choice of a method for describing actuality.

The generation of media reality we understand as cognitive construction of a reality presented in media with facts of actuality and facts of a constructor’s subjective reality. The source of constructive units for media reality can be fiction that determines the manipulative nature of a media text. Given the role of consciousness in the interaction of types of reality, the nature of the interaction and the nature of media reality, we also distinguish three types of factualization in the media discourse, but they are reflection, adaptation, and distortion. We consider them in more detail.

**Reflection** implies the most accurate facts describing the actuality. Its main goal is to inform, and the media reality constructed on the reflection mechanism is isomorphic to the actuality and is characterized by an objective and unprejudiced choice of content, composition, and perspective for displaying the actuality and a harmonious balance between the world and man. Consumers of media discourse, in turn, are dealing with actual facts in news texts. Moreover, it is necessary to take into account the effective potential of facts that are objective at first glance, as well as the author’s desire and ability to use this potential for his own purposes. The effect on the media recipients’ consciousness is also not excluded.

**Adaptation** is a correlation between the actuality and the current idea of it in the target audience’s reality, as well as an attempt to put a new fragment in the boundaries of the recipients’ cognitive patterns and modify the actuality to

the state expected by the audience [14]. The adaptation is also understood as adjustment of a text to the conditions of its functioning in order to ensure understanding by the recipient [15]. In our opinion, understanding is not enough in the media discourse; a recipient is forced to internalize the fact or its meaning. An internalized fact becomes a stimulus for changing and supplementing a personal world view and a presupposition for perception of subsequent information.

Adaptation allows greater freedom of interpretation on the part of the author of the message. The factualization of this type is involved into the influencing function of the media discourse. The fact of actuality undergoes adaptation to the audience's values, current ideas of actuality, and social tasks of the media reality constructor, which ensures the integrity of fragments of actuality in the structure of the media reality constructed [8]. The adaptation contributes to the internalization of media facts by recipients, on the one hand, and to the effective pragmatic impact on the consciousness of recipients, on the other hand. American journalism formulated the rationale for adapting actuality. "People will generally accept facts as truth, only if the facts agree with what they already believe". In other words, before informing the audience or proposing a comment on news, it is necessary to realize a value creation chain that will act as a reference point and serves the realization of pragmatic goals [16]. The succeeding facts will fit into a given scale, confirm it until there is a need to set new scales of values. This is achieved by a number of strategies and tactics.

**Distortion** is a purposefully created event's image, not consistent with the actuality. In the typology proposed, we correlate distortion with fiction. The factualization according to the distortion type, resulting from not understanding, but fiction, cannot be verified; the factoid becomes its product. Its function is any linguistic manipulation and entertainment. One of the perspectives of our study is to reveal the deviation characteristics of a fact.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The concept of factualization is not one of those developed in philology. In the philosophy of science, it is understood as an inverse theorization process, that is, identification of previously unrecorded facts in order to justify the prognostic ability of a current theory. The purpose of factualization is to confirm or refute a theory [17]. Of particular note is the philosophical concept developed by Lyapin on the presentation of fact as a {F1, F2, F3} three-dimensional tri-hypostatic unity of a fact, i.e., a fact of actuality, a fact of knowledge, and a fact of consciousness [18]. However, creating the concept of fact, Lyapin went beyond the boundaries of the fact itself and created a model of factualization, which consists in the transformation of hypostases from one to another in a certain sequence.

Arutyunova represents factualization as the 'birth' of a fact, i.e., "The actuality exists independently of man, but

the fact does not. A man isolates a fragment of actuality, and a certain aspect in it, conceptualizes it, structures it according to a model of judgment, verifies, and only then does he receive a fact" [10]. In other words, a fact as a speech unit or an assertion develops in several stages of cognitive transformations.

The term 'factualization' is rarely explained by philologists for various reasons. Our analysis of works of that kind revealed the following interpretations of factualization.

In a literary text, Fedotova defined factualization as an introduction of events in the status of real facts to a work of fiction [19]. This technique became popular in the cinema and involves famous historical events and historical characters—actual facts—being interlaced with fictionally based ones in a film script. Thereby this technique creates an illusion of a plausible plot. The most famous film of this kind is the film *Forrest Gump* directed by Robert Zemeckis, 1994.

The factualization as a communicative strategy to bring a fact to the addressee is considered by Karasik and consists in enlightening an event in more detail by mentioning certain participants and time and describing location of the incident (media chronotope), etc. The factualization is focused on details about the emotional state of characters and their behaviors, mentioning specific names, history of the relevant organizations, their places location, etc. [20].

In a dissertation study on the conceptualization of fiction, Ilyinova mentioned factualization as a cognitive process of introducing semantic deviations from the true events into the text or communication, which follows their conceptualization [21]. Thus, factualization is an element of a creative activity and consists in ontologization of fiction in a literary text.

In journalism, the factualization is considered as a communicative strategy for representing everything that happens in the world in the form of media facts. When processing a large volume of information that accompanies an individual and society, the media output an amount of facts that are well-arranged and are able to hold the audience in the reality factualized [22]. The factualization of a media image is realized with the help of answers to four key questions, i.e., What happened? Who participated in this? When and where did this happen? and How does this happen in the information field of the event being studied? [23].

The essence of the factualization Glazkov sees in a situation, when a person identifies facts as dynamic elements within the situation and gives special predicative names to facts. Therefore, the factualization is not limited to observing actual facts to build a further assertion, but the fact may be an unobservable event that has ever occurred, possible in the future, or simply fictitious [24].

As part of a dissertation research, Gorbacheva interprets factualization and performativity as identical communicative phenomena, consisting in the institutionalization of facts—assertions that correspond to the levels of speech action, act, and result in a new social reality [25]. The effects of the speech act are its

consequences in the form of events in actuality and reevaluation in a subjective reality.

The term ‘factualization’ is also used in mathematical linguistics in the framework of computer modeling of human intellectual processes and means documenting and legitimating of a certain state of affairs in a propositional content [26].

Considering the features of linguistic and stylistic picture and the issues of constructing sense in media texts, Dobrosklonskaya noted their special sound and tonality achieved due to many factors. The scientist offered three main types of media presentations as models for displaying real events—reflection, reconstruction, and myth [2]. The context of our study slightly changes the perspective of considering media texts. We avoid the name ‘myth’ proposed by Dobrosklonskaya for the third type of media presentations, since myth, in our opinion, embodies knowledge that can be easily symbolized due to the high value saturation of the corresponding narrative [20]. In addition, the distortion does not exclude a lie, while the myth does not deceive anyone, but only biases the meanings.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Thus, the term ‘factualization’ does not have a single definition in philology. It refers to the different stages of a fact development. On the one hand, this is a deliberate selection of an actual aspect of the selected fragment and its subsequent conceptualization (Glazkov), on the other hand, this is a stage of a fact’s ‘birth’ following the conceptualization and verbalization (Elijnova, Gorbacheva, Korolenko, and Romanov). Obviously, this means that the use of the term ‘factualization’ can be called intuitive due to the fact that current approaches in modern linguistics do not answer the question, how the movement of information flows between realities is possible. In this regard, it seems appropriate to consider this phenomenon as a cognitive process that ensures the transformation of a fact in each of the realities and their sequence.

The types of factualization in the media discourse are reflection of the actuality; adaptation of the actuality representation to the values of recipients in order to create conditions for the successful impact on their worldview; and distortion of actuality, its purposes can be different kinds of impact and entertainment. Reflection and adaptation as types of factualization provide a link between the actuality and its representation in the media. The media facts that have referents identified in the actuality are able to be verified, that is, evaluated from the point of view of the veracity of their representation. This cannot be said about the third type of factualization—distortion, generating a fragment of the media reality that does not have an original in the actuality.

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