

The role of ecolinguistics in traditional media and on the internet in terms of the coronavirus pandemic

Dmitry Ushakov^{1*}, *Victoria Olexiva*¹, and *Yulia Soprantsova*¹

¹Don State Technical University, Rostov-on-Don, Russia

Abstract. The article touches upon the most up-to-date problem of language and ecology interaction in terms of frequently spoken event which has been mentioned everywhere for the last two years – coronavirus pandemic. This disease influenced almost all spheres of the life over the world. The spread of coronavirus infection also had an impact on the information environment and ecological model of communication as a whole. At present we can see how terms, ordinary words and our speech as a whole get another meaning or they are understood in a different way. In this study we analyzed the dissemination of information about coronavirus infection in traditional media, in social media and on YouTube video hosting (on the material of the popular Russian science blogs). Also we tried to assess the role of popular science content, advertising campaign in traditional media and rules for posting information on the spread and prevention of coronavirus infection in social networks in stabilizing the mood of society during the pandemic period.

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has become the biggest event of the year 2020. For a long time, the media have been actively updating new information regarding the total number of infected and dead citizens, methods and ways of treating this disease and its symptoms, recommendations to keep safe social distance and self-isolation. It should be noted that many of these words appeared exactly in the process of the pandemic development.

Thus, the first half of 2020 was the reason for the emergence of a new vocabulary, including the creation and usage of new words related to the pandemic at the official level. New words related to the pandemic have been included in Webster’s Dictionary of English Usage, for example, the abbreviation COVID-19, developed from “CORonaVirus Disease 2019”, has been officially included into the list.

In April 2020, terms such as “covid”, “self-isolation” and other words related to the spread of the virus were included into the Oxford Dictionary. In addition, various words have appeared in the Russian language related to the life changes of people, for example, “remote work” and “social distance”, which now have completely different meanings.

*Corresponding author: dmitrijushakov@yandex.ru

As a result, now many previously known terms are perceived differently and have acquired completely new meanings. Thus, the term “social distance” previously meant alienation directly from other people around you. Today, “social distance” refers to physical distance from other people in order to take care of yourself and reduce the risk of infection from other people. Also, the previously known phrase as “personal protective equipment” was popular only among medical workers. Today it is used everywhere, implying the usage of medical masks and gloves.

2 Research

Throughout the time since the emergence of COVID-19, information has been actively disseminated in the media about ways to protect yourself and your loved ones, as well as the fact that everyone can get vaccinated against the virus for free. Advertisements about the possibility and necessity of vaccination are actively used in all existing media today.

Most Russian media companies state that they publish advertising information about vaccination for free as a support factor and civil duty. However, it is worth noting that these ads have quite high quality, the information presented on billboards and in commercials is well thought out and really makes you think about the need to get vaccinated against the virus.

In the first quarter of 2021, advertising published on federal channels reached more than 80 million people living in Moscow and the Moscow region, and outdoor advertising reached about 9 million people in Moscow itself.

As it was said in Mediascope, the videos published on federal channels and other media were produced on key national television channels, such as Perviy, Rossiya 1, Mir, Rossiya 24. The peak of the ongoing advertising campaign was in February 2021, and in January 2021 advertising videos were broadcasted more than seven hundred times.

An advertising campaign was also actively carried out within the framework of Russian radio channels, namely, Energy Radio, Humor FM, Children's Radio, Avtoradio. The total volume of audio clips about vaccination amounted to 584 times.

The placement of outdoor advertising about vaccination was completely free in many cities of the Russian Federation, as this advertisement belongs to the social type of ad. In addition, this type of advertising is considered quite effective, because in total, today about 70 million people have been vaccinated in the Russian Federation, which is about 48% of the total population of the country.

Of course, the spread of the coronavirus infection also had an impact on the information environment as a whole. The dissemination of information turned out to be not always very trustworthy; as a result, it misled the masses of people. Fake information served as a kind of trigger for the introduction of rules on the publication of information related to the spread of coronavirus infection.

Unfortunately, the rate of dissemination of false information is much higher than the rate of spread of the coronavirus infection itself, which is a rather frightening factor as it is.

The dissemination of this kind of information entails negative consequences of the coronavirus infection, in particular, due to the stigmatization and discrimination of people whose geographical location is in the so-called “red zone” (the territory affected by the outbreak of infected COVID - 19). First of all, to create a calm psychological atmosphere, collective solidarity should be kept, as well as the dissemination of only officially confirmed information.

The spread of rumors about the coronavirus infection, as well as misinformation of the population, is an environment that forms difficulties in the overall fight against the pandemic. So the key recommendation is to use only officially confirmed information related to the spread and prevention of coronavirus infection.

Besides, it should be noted that distributing any type of information regarding the coronavirus infection in the media, everyone should be careful about the terms and words used, as they can enhance the negative meaning in the already formed negative environment of the whole world.

For example, such simple words as "isolation" or "suspicious case" can form not only increased negativity in society, but also increase stigma in general. The usage of this kind of wording also creates negative attitudes in society, thereby provoking the growth of panic or neglect in relation to other citizens.

For this reason, some recommendations have been introduced in the media regarding the news publishing and any other type of data related to the spread and prevention of coronavirus infection.

Those recommendations include the usage of phrases that help to cultivate the recognition of human rights and respect for human dignity. It should be noted that the language used in the media has particular importance, as it has a direct impact on the perception and discussion of the pandemic.

The presentation of this or that material related to the pandemic in a negative way can have a negative impact on the mood of society, the attitude towards patients with suspected infection.

Now there are many different examples of how the use of non-discriminatory expressions and terms helps to fight negative attitudes and perceptions of various serious diseases and epidemics, including HIV, tuberculosis, etc.

For example, it is advisable to call the disease in the format "new coronavirus infection" (COVID-19). In the meantime, it is better not to use information about the beginning of the disease spread and its geographical origin.

It is also better to talk about infected people in such a way - people who have caught a new coronavirus infection or people who are being treated or who have died from COVID-19. It is better not to call people "victims of COVID-19".

Social networks have developed rules for posting information about the spread and prevention of coronavirus infection, as well as rules for advertising.

So, Facebook and Instagram continue to provide assistance to various international organizations in the field of health in obtaining the latest and reliable information about COVID-19 due to the existing pandemic. It should be noted that the administration of the above-mentioned networks clearly follows the introduced rules of advertising and actively fights against various tactics of an operational nature in the current conditions.

On a regular basis, appropriate changes are made to the control system in order to prevent the current situation in the world from being used for any mercenary purposes. Prohibitions on advertising activities of specific types of goods were also introduced and approved. Launching ads on social media, you must be aware of all terms and conditions and changes in the rules of advertising on controversial content, misleading statements, and advertising related to issues of public interest, elections or politics.

Besides, special rules have been introduced in the area of advertising directly related to social issues, elections or politics concerning COVID-19. So, provided that an advertisement related to issues of social significance, elections or politics contains any mention of coronavirus infection, its prevention and spread, a number of mandatory requirements are applied for its placement.

To publish a specific COVID-19 related ad on Facebook or Instagram, an advertiser must get special permission and upload information on funding sources to the platform.

3 Materials and methods

Within this study, an analysis on the dissemination of information about the coronavirus infection was made on the well-known YouTube video hosting.

The most popular videos published at the peak of the pandemic since the second half of the year 2020 were chosen as objects for analysis. The videos were selected from such popular science channels as “Topless”, “Postnauka”, and blog channels of Sergey Minaev and Artur Sharifov.

The reason for choosing these channels is, of course, due to their level of popularity on the network, as well as due to the fact that posted information not only covers a relevant topic, but is formulated, in our opinion, in accordance with the key principles of popular science journalism and is performed at a fairly high quality level.

Let's consider the most striking examples of the discussion of COVID-19. The analyzed videos were selected randomly, but taking into account the quality of the information provided, they were considered in accordance with the moment of their release on YouTube. The review of other materials analyzed was not described in the framework of this article, however, general analytics is taken into account for formulating the conclusions of the study.

The first video selected for analysis was published at the very beginning of the peak of the epidemiological situation in the Russian Federation and the world. The video got over 4 million views on the channel “Topless” on February 19, 2020. Video of Ian Lapotkov called "Chinese horror story. Coronavirus" presents the author's view on the history of the emergence and spread of the virus, as well as its symptoms and effects on the human body. Myths regarding the artificial nature of the appearance of this virus, the conspiracy to chip all people and the absence of this virus were also discussed.

During the broadcast, the author expresses his own position based on an emotional and rational approach, formulating quite logical conclusions in the process and sharing links to authoritative sources. The entire video sequence is formed in the entertaining format. The video quality is supported by maps of the dynamics of the coronavirus infection spread, infographics on the structure of the strain of the virus itself, etc.

Various techniques used in the video let the author present information in the easiest and most interesting way for users of the video hosting and help to understand the situation. Comments of users allow us to verify this hypothesis.

It is also worth noting that in the comments after watching the video there are no hints of a discussion directly from users regarding the information content and the release content. That is, no one shares their own opinion or new facts on the topic.

On the basis of these factors, the following idea was developed: such a release received an exclusively emotional response from those who watched it in the format of an entertainment show, which led to the perception of the coronavirus with irony and a touch of humor.

The following analyzed video is called “Coronaviruses / What I know.” of the equally popular channel “Postnauka”. Here the questions were asked on this exciting topic in the format of live broadcast, the answers to which were given by the national virologist, Doctor of Biological Sciences Sergey Alkhovskii, as well as directly by the host of the project, Roman Avdeev.

The key purpose of this video is to let people get answers to questions and more detailed information regarding the strain of a new coronavirus infection from competent sources.

These issues were especially relevant in this period of time, because in the first months since the beginning of the pandemic (December 2019), little information was provided regarding the symptoms, methods of its prevention and treatment, because the virus was

still being studied and there was no precise understanding of its nature and effects on the person.

The value of this video, of course, lies in the involvement of an experienced specialist who understands the topic and has enough competencies to provide feedback on the topic of the virus. The outs of the video are the lack of any additional visual and graphic tools. Nevertheless, the number of video views amounted to almost 200 thousand views on video hosting.

The comments under the video let us see the assimilation of information and a positive assessment from the public. They also noted in the comments the incorrect behavior of the host himself, which manifested in violations of security rules, namely: the host coughed into his hand and held it out to the guest. Such a reaction from the public indicates an understanding of the safety rules for maintaining one's own health and avoiding the possibility of contact with a new coronavirus infection.

This video, by demonstrating an objective view of a competent professional, presented people with a fairly competent view of the current situation, as well as clear and easily understandable recommendations.

The next analyzed video titled “The world will not be the same (we, neither)”, published on April 23, 2020 on the channel of the well-known blogger Artur Sharifov, presents the view of the author himself on this situation. Artur believes that everyone should not panic in this situation and should remember about the already existing preventive measures with pre-existing viruses, draw conclusions about the mistakes made and be as loyal as possible to the recommendations of doctors.

The outs of this video include the absence of any links and confirmation of information by reliable and authoritative sources.

The use of restless background music, the dark clothes of the host, bright animated images and video clips from various news channels and films contribute to attracting attention and creating the appropriate mood in the video. The blogger's task was to convey elementary safety rules, relying on personal opinion and authority, to the masses and calm them down in a situation of panic.

The bunch of comments from users showed an ironic and humorous approach to the current situation. So, people joke about self-isolation, other people, the opinion of some leaders of other countries. Such an attempt to humorously approach the most pressing problem of our time can be attributed to one of the options for a critical understanding of the real situation, as well as the control of various kinds of negative reactions (panic, fear, and so on).

The last analyzed video “Pandemic: plague, Spanish flu and cholera / Lessons of history”, published on April 23 on the channel of the Russian writer and historian Sergey Minaev, differs from those discussed earlier. The host does not talk about the origin of the new virus and its symptoms, but, using the coronavirus as the main newsbreak, analyzes the experience of mankind in the fight against other pandemics.

Sergey Minaev consistently talks about how people survived the Justinian plague, the bubonic plague, the Spanish flu and cholera, what conclusions they drew facing new diseases, and how this experience helped to fight new epidemics.

Such a discussion is aimed at destroying the illusion that the Covid-19 pandemic, international quarantine and self-isolation have no analogues in world history. The realization that this has already been experienced and was defeated reassures the audience: most often we find words of gratitude to the author in the comments, users are surprised by the similarity of situations and the behavior of people in them, irony over myths about coronavirus and ridiculous ways to deal with a new disease.

It should also be noted that, despite the length of the video (94 minutes), it got 470 thousand views: the audience must be attracted by the original approach to the topic, the

humorous presentation of information, visual tools (the presence of maps, photographs and illustrations).

4 Conclusion

An analysis of Russian popular science content on YouTube video hosting shows that the topic of the coronavirus is becoming popular in it. In such videos, the most discussed topics are the following: a detailed description of the symptoms of a new strain of the virus, its origin, methods of combating the disease, exposing ineffective methods of preventing the spread of coronavirus and other mystifications on this topic.

Through rational (appeal to statistics, research, authoritative sources and opinions) and emotional (dynamic narration, sound accompaniment, selection of associative illustrations, humor, irony, precedent texts, and so on) methods of influence, popular science bloggers convey relevant and necessary information to the audience on the topic of coronavirus, contribute to the fight against the infodemic.

An absolutely new image of coronavirus is being built within this discourse - it is not a frightening new disease that has no analogues, but a logical development of an existing virus, the spread of a new strain. Describing the current situation as something that has already happened, bloggers give viewers simple algorithms of acting that can help protect themselves and others, and also make fun of useless and sometimes harmful methods of dealing with the disease.

We also note that this content, judging by the number of views, is popular within the Russian audience. And the analysis of comments lets us conclude that users find these videos useful. We can sum up that the main hypothesis about the potential of popular science content in stabilizing the mood of the society during the pandemic has been confirmed, since this type of content is able to convincingly provide verified information on the topic of coronavirus to a wide audience, users remember this content and trust it.

References

1. O. Mukhina The topic of coronavirus in the context of the theory of setting the agenda, in *Problems of Mass Communication: Proceedings of the International Symposium of researchers and teachers of journalism, advertising and public relations*, pp. 35-37, 2-5 May 2020, Voronezh (2020)
2. A. Orlyak, *Language, Culture and Literature* 2, pp 118–122 (2020)
3. M. Pestova, *Media Environment*, 1. pp 166–172 (2020)
4. E. Semyonova, *Scientific and Practical Research* 5–3 (28), pp 62–65 (2020)
5. S. Serova, Coronavirus pandemic and regional media: accidental information distortions and misinformation, in *Problems of Mass Communication: Proceedings of the International Symposium of researchers and teachers of journalism, advertising and public relations*, pp 50–52, 2-5 May 2020, Voronezh (2020)