

## The Pragmatic Features of Texts in Classified Advertisement in Russian and English Languages

*Irina Sergeevna Stroeva*

Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University,  
Pyatigorsk, Stavropol Region, Russia

---

**Abstract:** Classifieds are a many-sided phenomenon that has been functioning as such not only in English language editions but also in Russian periodicals lately. Transposition of classifieds, treated by English and American people as a sociocultural phenomenon, caused a row of urgent problems. That's why the investigation of classifieds is so actual. One of the problems is the difference between text pragmatics in English and Russian classifieds. The article contains a comparative analysis of pragmatic parameters belonging to some types of such texts using the method of speech acts.

**Key words:** Classified advertisement • Pragmatics • Speech acts

---

### INTRODUCTION

Linguo-stylistics studies advertising copy since the 1970s focusing on general structural and compositional features of advertising copy [Leech [1], I.G. Shestakova [2], L.V. Karatayeva [3]]. Advertisement was classified according to categories of advertised goods: office equipment [E.A. Doludenko [4]], cars and real estate [A.V. Zimin [5]]; they described stylistic devices as means for advertisement effectiveness [S.N. Usacheva [6]], S.G. Kara-Murza [7]]. In the late 20 – early 21 century, advertising copy began to be considered a kind of discourse [S.F. Lisovskiy [8], M.R. Zheltukhina [9]], a style of the special sphere of relations – mass communications [M.M. Nazarov [10]; G.P. Bakulev [11]].

Traditionally, advertisement was defined as a specific variety of newspaper functional style [I.V. Rogozina, A.A. Strizhenko [12]], or as a genre variety of newspaper and then as a specific phenomenon of mass communication. At the same time, some linguo-stylists did not see any difference between spheres of communication and style varieties of communication. For instance, a representative of the Moscow school of stylistics V.L. Nayer regarded mass communication as a special megastyle. Besides, he noted that megastyles came into existence as a result of blurred boundaries between both traditional style systems and communication spheres served by styles. V.L. Nayer

picks out three big megastyles and relevant spheres of communication: professional and business communication sphere, mass communication sphere and art communication sphere [13, pp. 82-91]. Mass communication has the widest audience called “the masses”. It is notable for original forms and neatly highlighted informative key points. In V.L. Nayer's opinion, one of the forms of mass communications is communication with the help of advertising copy. We suppose that, in this classification, advertising copy could occupy a middle position between two megastyles: the business-professional megastyle and the mass one. The place for classifieds' texts in this megastyle is quite exact, undisputed in English and American society. However, it is difficult to identify classifieds' place in modern Russian society for linguo-stylistic and sociocultural reasons.

**The Main Part:** “Classifieds” is a term widely used in stylistics and marketing, though it does not have a definite interpretation yet. Classified ad is a “small ad” (Br E), i.e. a small advertisement or an advertisement called “want ad” (Am E). It is put in a newspaper by a man who wants to buy or sell something, to offer job or to receive it, etc. [14, p.352].

In the stylistics textbook [15, p.301], L.V. Nayersays the following about advertisement: “various kinds of

information are united in it according to the theme. Each section has its name. For example, a reader will never be mistaken while searching in several hundreds of ads in the newspaper "The Times". Ads divided into groups there, such as Births, Marriages, Deaths, In Memoriam, Business Offers, Personal, etc." D. Chrystal gives a longer list of possible varieties of classifieds: "Columns of classified ads include such categories (let's call them "themes" or "heading") as auctions, cars, business, career, entertainment, health and safety, real estate, investment, lost-and-found ads, prestige". The latter heading is the most interesting one, because Chrystal includes notices proper in it, but not ads: Births, Marriages and Deaths, In Memoriam and Situations Wanted [16, p.388].

In classifieds, as a phenomenon of mass, social communication, there is a complex system of conventional rules and prohibitions that regulate subject-object relations between the members of communication, volumetric-pragmatic segmentation of text and its speech-act structuring.

Speech-act structuring forms the sociopragmatics of classified ads in general. It also promotes revelation of sociocultural specificity of one-theme texts in different language spaces – English (with rich traditions of classified advertisement) and Russian that is just forming its advertisement communication space by means of short texts in periodicals.

While describing communicative-pragmatic structure of text as an integrated speech act, we were guided by speech acts with taxonomy that is established since the time of J.L. Austin and J.R. Searle. Although Austin, Searle and their followers limit speech acts to a separate expression or a dialogic unity, we suppose that their taxonomy, with certain improvements, can be used in describing a short text. Classified ad's copy is exactly that kind of text. The taxonomy of speech act was adjusted several times. Thus, J. Austin widened the taxonomy of speech acts [17, p.119]. He called them veridictives, exercitives, behabitives and expositives. Veridictives are marked out by adjudgement sign and represent "an appraisal, an opinion or an approval". The examples of exercitives are: an assignment to a post, a voting, an order, a compulsion, a piece of advice, a warning. Commissives are similar to veridictives and exercitives – these are promises and commitments. Behabitives make a mixed group connected with social behaviour and people relations: an apology, congratulations, an approval, a condolence, a quarrel and a challenge.

The founders of speech act theory, including Searle,

criticized Austin for narrowness in understanding speech acts and for boiling them down to a verb [18, p.177]. In our opinion, if one described speech acts of classifieds exclusively in Austin's terms, it would only allow us to find behabitives-condolences and valuation veridictives. Commissive promises (we'll call them "promissives" later) would also be found in our classification. Expositives with their broad spectrum of illocutionary force will do for us as a general definition of advertisement copies pragmatics.

Other terms are used in Searle's classification: representatives, directives, commissives, expressive and declarations. Let us describe them concisely. Representatives show information as true or false. Directives are the attempts to achieve something. Searle's list of verbs-commissives is shorter than Austin's one; many verbs repeat themselves. Verbs-expressives convey emotive-psychological state of a communicator (like behabitives do). Searle's declarations are similar to Austin's performatives: he provides the same examples "You are fired", "I declare" [18, p.p.180-188]. Both classifications are actively used by linguists while describing various speech acts, especially in oral speech [19, p.147].

Having compared both taxonomies, we suppose that, on the whole, representatives, behabitives, expositives, declaratives and commissives are generally typical for advertisement copies. Among behabitives, we marked out appellatives and sensitives. Commissives are specified as promissives (from the word "promise") and representatives are specified as informatives. The analysis of English and Russian periodicals showed that classified ads contain informatives, declaratives, appellatives, promissives and sensitives on the communicative-pragmatic level. Besides, requestives (from the word "request") hold a special place. They are included in texts informing about a death and forthcoming lying-in-state ceremony. Our requestives are akin to Searle's directives in a manner.

Let us define text speech acts and provide examples.

Informative is a speech act of simple statement of fact. He is similar to representative:

*4APARTMENTS FOR SALE – 1107 Poplar St. Apartments A, B, C & D. Call 919-734-...*

In the area of the bus station the dog has lost: bulldog, boy, color fawn: *Tel.: +7908 16...*

In informative speech acts, they state the place and the time of an event ("BMD" or "L&F"), the place a

firm/enterprise holds in a relevant system: international, local; its size: a small firm; a big firm; enterprise location or realty for sale: Whiteleys Parade. The next type of information is, for instance, a report on corporate capital: with annual turnover in excess of 1 million pounds.

A performative verb turns informative into declarative. This applies especially to texts about engagements where verbal expressions (“announce the engagement”) are the speech acts as such. So, the majority of texts about sales and job are the contaminated speech acts in which informative is mixed with declarative. We will designate such speech act as Informative/Declarative or Declarative/Informative where “/” is a sign of contamination. Here is an example of Informative/Declarative speech act:

Sale cupboard second-hand, in good condition, made in Poland. 33-70-60.

Appellative “appeals” to readers with the help of appeals marked by exclamation marks and imperative forms of verbs:

Order a window and get a gift!

*Wanted! A job that will grow with your family.*

In the latter example, appellativity and promissiveness are combined because a verb in future tense is used in it.

Promissives (promises) are a subspecies of commissives [18, p.209]. They are used in ads about vacancies where they tell us about advertised job prospects. This speech act is included in the prospective part of text compositional structure: you can expect plenty of support; we will offer you top quality work and excellent working environment.

Sensitives make a special group. They are speech acts in which they inform us about relatives and friends’ feelings concerning a birth, a marriage or a death of some people.

Requestives, at a first glance, are similar to declaratives, but requestives are less categorical. They express not a declaration or an appraisal but a request to do or not to do something. A request is put into shape by means of the word “please”, the conditional clause “if desired” / “if so desired”, the verb “ask”: Family flowers only please.

So, we revealed the following speech act types of advertisement copies: single-component speech acts (pure and contaminated), double-component speech acts and multicomponent speech acts that include three or

more components. It should be noted that we did not consider reference data (phone, address) as speech acts, if not preceded by the verb “call”. This is because this information does not fulfill the speech function in the text and does not have a pragmatic focus.

The description of pragmatic features of classifieds in speech act terms made it possible to find out how illocutionary forces are distributed in a text and to classify them according to their complexity. The analysis of the material showed that English and Russian classifieds contain no more than four speech acts (excluding the actual formula). This is because text of such a genre has a general normative and stylistic aim – to be a short informative message.

Single-component informative speech acts function only in specialized national and regional multipage periodicals where heading title, uniting a series of microtexts, “assumes” the role of declarative applying to all microtexts – “For Sale”, “Wanted”, “For Rent”. Such combination of general title of the heading (a declarative) and text (a single-component speech act) prevail in Russian classifieds. In English language classifieds informative titles of headings are frequent: “Real Estate”, “Cars”, “Service”. They can be found in Russian classifieds too: “Houses”, “Realty”, etc. Such title speech acts implicitly contain declaratives: “sale, rent, suggest, find, welcome to work”.

Double-component speech act structures are used in all types of classifieds. We found out: Informative + Informative, Informative + Appellative, Appellative + Informative, Informative/Appellative + Informative, Informative + Declarative, Declarative + Informative, Informative/Appellative + Declarative/Informative, Informative/Declarative + Declarative/Promissive, Informative + Promissive, Informative + Sensitive.

Here are the examples:

*ABANDON your search! (Appellative) Proven worldwide and it works. L2-L8, 00 pm part/full time from home 01278 509527 (24Hrs). (Informative)*

*Urgently!!! (Appellative) Unfinished house. (Informative)*

There are more complex (or contaminated) speech acts in multi-component speech acts. Here, the contaminated speech acts include: Informative/Declarative, Sensitive/Informative, Informative/Appellative, Declarative/Appellative and

Informative/Declarative/Sensitive. The contamination of requestive is not registered.

Let us provide the examples of simple multi-component speech acts in English texts of “Lost&Found” and “Jobs” types:

*FOUND CAT – White with tabby spots (Informative).  
Male, declawed, neutered, flea collar. (Informative)  
Old Mt. Olive Hwy. area. (Informative).*

*ARE YOU LOOKING FOR – a 3 bedroom, 2 baths?  
(Appellative) Owner will finance with steady job.  
(Promissive) Other homes available for sale.  
(Informative).*

In double-component and multi-component speech acts, there are two contaminated types: Informative/Appellative and Declarative/Informative. The material showed that speech acts are contaminated in the local press (Russian and English) more frequently.

On the speech act level, the greatest isomorphism is peculiar to the texts that became universal for English and Russian linguo-cultural space: “Jobs”/ “Rabota”, “Real Estate”/ “Nedvijimost”, “Cars”/ “Automobili”, “Service”/ “Uslugi”, “Sale”/ “Prodaji”, “Lost& Found”/ “Uter’an/Nayden” and partially “Transport”/ “Transport”. More than a half of the texts we analyzed have the following structures: Informative + Informative, Declarative + Informative, Informative + Appellative or Appellative + Informative.

Sensitives form the communicative centre of English ads about lost and found pets, while relevant Russian texts have declaratives (the declared consideration). Multi-component speech acts are typical for English texts “Death”. Here we can find mostly sensitives combined with promissives and requestives. There are no such constructions in Russian classifieds.

Texts that are specific for English social culture (“Births”, “Marriages”, “Forthcoming marriages”, “Engagements”) have very short informative structures on the speech act level: Informative, Informative + Informative, Informative/Declarative. There are no texts with such a structure in Russian press either.

### CONCLUSION

We suppose that communicative-pragmatic types of classifieds we described do not exhaust all the diversity

of speech act structures of such texts. The stability of so called classified, one-line advertisement shaped like short black-and-white texts with horizontal or (more rarely) leads to the isomorphism of speech act structures of these texts in Russian and English sociocultural space. However, the rapid development of the Internet adjusts speech act structure of texts: they are reduced on the main page but can be unfolded into a full informative message by one click. Thus, genre signs of classifieds formed in newspapers are being erased.

### REFERENCES

1. Leech, 1966. G.H. English in Advertising. A Linguistic Study of Advertising in Great Britain. London: Longman, XIV, pp: 210.
2. Shestakova, I.G., 1986. On Compositional and Stylistic Specificity of Scientific and Technical Advertisement Texts. / I.G. Shestakova // The semantic and stylistic aspects of language units functioning. – Barnaul, pp: 142-148.
3. Karatayeva, L.V., 2003. The Comparative Analysis of Advertising Vocabulary in Russian and German press (the functional-semantic and word-formative aspect) Author’s abstract. Candidate of Philological Sciences: 10.02.20 / L.V. Karatayeva. The State University of Adygei. Maykop, pp: 25.
4. Doludenko, E.A., 1998. Technical Advertisement Texts, Their Semantic-Syntactic and Pragmatic Characteristics (on the material of English language). Author’s abstract. Candidate of Philological Sciences: 10.02.04 / E.A. Doludenko. Pyatigorsk, pp: 17.
5. Zimin, A.V., 2001. English-Russian equivalents in explication of advertising text (the comparative study on the material of rubricated advertisement): the thesis. Candidate of Philological Sciences: 10.02.20 /A.V. Zimin. Pyatigorsk, pp: 172.
6. Usacheva, S.N., 2004. Semantic Structure of Advertising Texts in Communicative and Culturological Aspects. Author’s abstract. Candidate of Philological Sciences: 10.02.19 / S.N. Usacheva. – Chelyabinsk, pp: 19.
7. Kara-Murza, S., 2003. The Short Course on Manipulation of Conscience. / S.G. Kara-Murza. Moscow, “Eksmo”, pp: 448.
8. Lisovskiy, S.F., XXXX. The Politic Advertisement: The Functional and Genre-Stylistic Features.

- Author's abstract. Candidate of Philological Sciences: 10.01.10 / S.F. Lisovskiy. Lomonosov MSU. – Moscow, pp: 32.
9. Zheltukhina, M.R., 2003. Tropological Suggestibility of Mass-Media Discourse: on the Problems of Speech Influence of Tropes in Mass-Media Language: the monograph / M.R. Zheltukhina. – Moscow, the Linguistic Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Volgograd, pp: 656.
  10. Nazarov, M.M., 2004. Mass Communication and Society. Introduction in the Theory and the Research/ M.M. Nazarov. Moscow, “Avanti Plus”, pp: 427.
  11. Bakulev, G.P., 2005. Mass Communication: The Western Theories and Conceptions / G.P. Bakulev. – Moscow, “Aspect Press”, pp: 176.
  12. Rogozina, I.V. and A.A. Strizhenko, 1998. On the Parameters of Intellectual Advertising Text / I.V. Rogozina, A.A. Strizhenko // Text Semantics and Pragmatics – Barnaul, pp: 87-95.
  13. Nayer, V.L., 1980. On One Aspect of Language Specificity of Mass Communication / V.L. Nayer //Collected Papers. Moscow, – Iss, 151: 82-91.
  14. Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture, 1992. Longman Group UK Limited, pp: 1528.
  15. Nayer, V.L., 1981. Newspaper Style. M.: Vysšaja škola, pp: 295-307.
  16. Crystal, D., 1995. The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language. Cambridge University Press, pp: 490.
  17. Austin, J.L., 1986. Word as an Act. / J.L. Austin // New in Foreign Linguistics. – Moscow, “Progress” Iss. 17: The Theory of Speech Acts, pp: 22-129.
  18. Searle, J.R., 1986. What a Speech Act Is? / J.L. Searle //New in Foreign Linguistics. Moscow, “Progress”, Iss. 17: The Theory of Speech Acts, pp: 151-170.
  19. Wagner, K.R., 2001. Pragmatics of the German language. Frankfurt; Berlin; New York; Oxford; Wien: Lang., pp: 495.