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*О. А. Вальгер**(Новосибирский государственный педагогический университет)***LIVE BLOGGING AS A GENRE OF MEDIA TEXTS**

Статья посвящена специфике англоязычных новостных текстов типа «онлайн-трансляция» или «обновляемый текст» в сети Интернет на материале сорока случайно выбранных статей такого типа из четырёх ведущих интернет-изданий. Автор рассматривает жанрово-стилистические особенности текстов массовой коммуникации, освещающих длительные, развивающиеся события и интегрирующих профессионально произведённый текст со свидетельствами очевидцев, высказываниями известных людей или широкой аудитории.

*Ключевые слова:* англоязычные тексты, онлайн-трансляция, интернет, массовая коммуникация, жанрово-стилистические особенности.

The article is devoted to the specificity of Internet news texts in English that belong to live blogging type studied on the material of forty live blogs from four major news websites. The author researches the stylistic and genre characteristics of mass communication texts that are coverage of long-term, developing events and integrate professionally produced text with witness accounts, comments from public figures or representatives of wide audiences.

We are witnessing a major change in the way the world reads, as the broad transition of reading from printed page to electronic screen revolutionizes the newspaper industry. According to NRS Readership Report published on November, 30th 2016 during the period between October 2015 and September 2016 absolutely every British newspaper out of the major 40 under study had the majority of its readers viewing the newspapers online. For instance the monthly audience of the Guardian is estimated as 4,037 million people for the print edition and 6,972 million people for the digital edition [16]. With the main audiences increasingly moving online, and the digital medium enabling higher speed of communicating news to the public, it is no wonder that digital versions of newspapers have had to adapt their format to the challenges that Internet provides.

One of these challenges is the so-called “amateur journalism”, or “peer news” [4, p. 92] that are distributed via social networks and blogging platforms. The

concepts of “a witness”, “a source” and “a newsmaker” are often blended in social networks, where a person who spotted an event may almost instantly share a photo or a video with a short comment on his or her page, and this post may spread far more effectively than a professionally made record of the same event broadcast an hour later. This competition means that in order to get the hype of the event, every newspaper now competes not only for the most detailed and verified articles, but also for the fastest publication of the news. This high value of prompt publication is most often criticized for lowering the quality of digital news [6, p. 472; 17] but it also conditioned the thrive of live blogging, a genre of digital news which appeared with the spread of high-speed Internet access in the developed parts of the world and flourished since the emergence of social networks, particularly Facebook and Twitter.

Live blogging has been defined by Neil Thurman and Anna Walters as “a single

blog post on a specific topic to which time-stamped content is progressively added for a finite period—anywhere between half an hour and 24 hours” [8, p.85]. This definition has an advantage of listing some of the characteristics of live blogs, but it has a sharp pragmatic focus which is not suitable for our needs. The time frame also looks too restrictive, as a number of live blogs exceed the limit (for example, live blogs on Aleppo attacks in October 2016 were updated on a period from 1 to 7 days). This study defines a live blog as “a digital article that covers a developing situation live by arranging small pieces of text, sound or visual content in reverse chronological order”.

Studies show that live blogging role is very large. A leading force in digital news, the guardian.co.uk alone published 146 live blogs a month in 2014 [8, p. 87]. This high number also means a great degree of reader involvement, as live blogs are far longer than usual digital articles that fit within 700-1200 words limit [3, p. 83]. However, very few studies have concentrated on this genre, and research on the linguistic peculiarities of live blogging are almost non-existent.

For this research we have chosen 40 live blogs from 4 large news websites: theguardian.com, bbc.com/news, cnn.com and nytimes.com. Two of the websites represented British news media, and two websites represented American news. All of them are among the fifteen most popular news websites in the world as of 2016 according to “Top 15 Most Popular News Sites” ranking [13]. The live blogs were randomly chosen from the massive of articles published between February 2016 and January 2017. Seven of the blogs were discussed with 42 Advanced and Upper-Intermediate ESL students during practical classes in Language in the Press at Novosibirsk State Pedagogical University in order to confirm or contradict the author’s observations on the stylistic peculiarities

of live blogging.

Content analysis has shown that the average length of the live blogs under study was 46 lead parts. Direct in-built borrowings of visual content from social networks averaged 21 cases in a live blog. The divergence of word count was so high that we suggested that this parameter is not a credible average, as the word count differed depending on content rather than characterized a typical feature of a live blog. In one cases, two live blogs from different sources covered the same event – presidential elections in the USA, more particularly, the election day.

The analysis enabled us to define characteristic features of live blogging in terms of genre and stylistic features as well as define the main types of events that can be covered with this type of article. The effect of this form of coverage on the audience can be illustrated with the responses from the students who took part in the research.

We have defined the following characteristic features of live blogging as a genre:

**1. A live blog consists of many relatively independent parts** that can be called “lead parts”, as their style is very similar to lead paragraphs in traditional hard news and contains a short detailed account of the most recent development in the topic under coverage. The lead paragraphs are based on the 5-wh structure (who, what, where, when, why):

*CNN Politics November 9, 2016 2:04pm  
Latest on popular vote*

*Donald Trump has won the presidency and is well over the 270 threshold in the Electoral College, but **as more votes are tallied, Hillary Clinton is up 0.2 percentage points** in the popular vote – about 200,000 votes – **with 92% of the vote counted.***

*Much of the outstanding vote count is **on the West Coast**, where Clinton has fared well.*

**2. Most of the parts have a separate**

**headline** that follows all the rules for traditional articles headlines, but more often indicates the source of information. The headlines tend to be dynamic, they are either written in the Present Indefinite Tense in the meaning of historic present (e.g. “Schumer releases statement”, “Hillary Clinton concedes with emotional speech”) or are composed as noun strings (e.g. “At the White House today, a mix of tears and resilience”, “The 2016 voter breakdown”, “Trump’s challenges: From the Middle East, to the European Union”). The headlines are often heavily laden with drama and emphasis, often increasing the tension with the use of colon, the Future Indefinite Tense or the Present Continuous Tense (e.g. “ Watch: Obama on patriotism”, “The front pages America is waking up to this morning”, “Protesters: ‘Not our president’”). Direct in-built borrowings from Twitter and Instagram are often unentitled as they already look like a complete piece with the name of the profile serving as a headline.

**3. The individual parts most often have a byline** in cases of domestic and international news coverage, for instance in the live blogs on US presidential debates from CNN, on Women’s March from the Guardian, on Syria crisis from the New York Times. However, more precisely localized news where one or two reporters are in charge of the whole story often have a byline on top of the article and do not have bylines for individual parts.

**4. Almost every part is supported with graphic content** – photographs, infographics, tables, diagrams, videos. In the blogs that were randomly selected for the study there were no cases of sound or music borrowed for live blogging without supporting video content.

**5. The order of parts is reverse chronological, and every part has a clear indication of the time of publication.** Older parts are at the bottom of the page, newer parts are at the top. In all of the live blogs

under study the page showed only the newest posts, and older posts could be seen on a click.

**6. The first part is always the summary of the whole topic,** and it is the only part that is changed during the process. The updates are posted write into the part, and instead of the publication time the updating time is indicated. In case of CNN, which is also a TV channel, the summary post is a short video. Other news websites prefer a text version of the summary, including the BBC that employs a list to sum up the main points of the event:

*5 Dec 2016 06:00 Last day of Supreme Court Brexit case*

*Summary*

- Supreme Court case ends with reminder it’s not about stopping Brexit
- Government appealed against ruling it needs MPs’ approval to trigger Brexit
- Judgement is expected in January
- Watch highlights of each day via clips above, or scroll down to see how events unfolded

**7. In some cases, the live blog is divided into several categories.** For example, the CNN live blog “Presidential debate live” from October, 9, 2016 was divided into four sections: “Live Blog”, “Fact Check”, “Top Republicans”, “Top Democrats” that enabled the edition to focus on more editorial content in the first section and separate the streams of the reactions of the two opposing parties and their supporters. Live blogging has been criticized for causing information overload [Anderson, 2011], and it looks like in some cases when a whole country is eager to have a say on the event, one stream of live blogging is too confusing for the readers to follow. Two of the blogs under study (“Live election results and coverage” from the CNN and “European Union referendum polling day” from the Guardian) have enough information to read for at least a day and include multiple cross-links to extra traditional publications at the same website.

The Guardian tends to divide longer events into several live blogs while the CNN can update live blogs a month later.

8. Unlike in traditional articles, in all the four editions under study **live blogs easily refer to competing websites** and may include direct links to the competitor's content. The consumption patterns of live blogging are so different from the traditional newspaper format that editors seek to provide an impression that nothing that happens is left uncovered by the live blog, and reference to other sources help the readers stay in the same page and not look for alternative media. Judging by the students' responses we may suggest that a live blog creates personal involvement in the unfolding event. 12 of the 42 students mentioned that in several cases they have been so engaged in the live coverage that they stopped other activities for the day and kept updating the page every several minutes. To satisfy this kind of need for more details editors need to borrow content from all the available sources.

9. Live blogging in professional media is almost always **done in collaboration**. None of the blogs under study was edited by one person in charge, and in some cases teams of more than 10 journalists worked on one live blog, sharing the responsibilities of surfing social networks, keeping track of the event in person and reporting the new development on site, monitoring or asking for official reactions from public figures and governments. Monitoring social networks for responses of public figures has been made easier with the introductions of hashtags, short key words that many people include in their messages to share them with general public. Although not all people do it, live blogging teams typically have a list of personal pages that can generate extra news. For example, in the CNN live blog on a presidential debate a response from Joanne Rowling, the world-famous author of "Harry Potter" series was listed 20 seconds after its publica-

tion, despite the fact that the authentic post contained no hashtag.

10. **Paragraphs inside individual parts are much shorter** than in traditional articles and contain only one or two sentences, with two to four paragraphs in a lead-like part, for example, in this extract from the Guardian's "European Union referendum polling day":

*24 Jun 2016 18:30*

***Voters stuck at Waterloo station***

*The storms have brought Waterloo station to a standstill, potentially affecting thousands of passengers who may not have voted.*

*The station is a major hub for people commuting from outside London many of whom would likely have left in the morning too early to vote.*

*Many people have taken to social media to express concern that they will miss the 10pm deadline.*

11. **Journalists' inputs in a live blog tend to be neutral in emotional tone**, matter-of-fact and aim at the impression that the coverage is objective and does not impose any point of view. It is not necessarily true because the very choice of reader-produced content may be suggestive of the edition's political preferences. But the overall neutrality of the edition-produced parts of live blogs may be a key component of their wide spread, as media neutrality is in high demand, and news consumers stress that. For example, in a poll in 2010 "about six-in-ten (62%) say they prefer getting political news from sources that do not have a particular point of view" [18].

12. The complex of stylistic peculiarities of live blog texts suggests **that this genre belongs to publicist style in its newspaper variety**. Live blogging employs coherent and logical sentence composition, modest use of stylistic devices, predominance of narration, brevity of expression, characteristic combination of emotional appeal and argumentation, the use of terminology and abbreviation, all of which

aim at the effect of verified information [2, p. 88]

All of these characteristic features contribute to the unique effect of live blogging on the reader. Traditional articles are strategically planned so that the journalists become sources of knowledge and influence the audience [1, p. 150]. In their responses on the effect and perception of live blog texts the 42 students who took part in the research mentioned the following things: great personal involvement in the topic; hypnotic effect when the reader is glued to the news and cannot continue daily chores; the impression of reliability of the whole text including borrowings from social networks that the reader would not have trusted as readily otherwise; the illusion of objectivity of coverage, as the inputs from editors do not really convey any perspective; the awareness of a great importance of the event, sometimes defined in terms of a historic event; the communal feeling of simultaneousness and solidarity with thousands of other people who keep track of the event with you.

This kind of effect may be produced on the audience when several specific types of event are unfolding. We have attempted to make an inventory of events covered in live blogs in the four news websites. The list comprises the following events:

- 1) elections and referendums, candidate nominations, political debates;
- 2) new laws, parliamentary proceedings;
- 3) conferences, panel discussions, seminars and schools, UN sessions;
- 4) awards and awarding ceremonies;
- 5) criminal cases, legal issues, court

hearings;

6) sports games, matches, championships, cups and tournaments;

7) natural disasters, catastrophes, terror attacks, extreme weather;

8) protests, meetings, campaigns;

9) armed conflicts, military operations, air bombings;

10) international political and humanitarian crises;

11) weddings, funerals, graduation ceremonies, ceremonies of public character;

We may outline the similar characteristics of these events that make them suitable for live blogging coverage. Such events last for at least several hours, inspire public interest and spontaneous comment from the audience, involve a considerable number of people directly, are likely to have an effect on the future events in other spheres, happen in countries with on-site presence of reporters and large domestic media, are broadcast on TV or have multiple witnesses. These features contribute to the success of live blogs among the audience interested in the event, and make the costly live blogging worthwhile.

The digital media age conditions more and more active involvement of audiences in developing the content of the media, and live blogging as a hybrid form of collaboration between a team of journalists and the general public is a successful genre. While complicated and costly, it attracts the readers to the news website in a way similar to live broadcasts on TV. Live blogging retains the characteristic features of publicist style in its newspaper variety and has at least 12 distinct features that make it a unique genre.

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