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THE CLASH OF TRADITIONAL AND EUROPEAN VALUES BASED ON THE CONCEPT OF ACCESSIBLE LANGUAGE IN THE MEDIA¹

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Abstract. *This examines the interaction between traditional Bulgarian values and European orientations regarding accessible language in media and public institutions. The study focuses on Bulgarian society's, especially young people's, readiness to adopt the European concept of plain language in civic communication. It explores how cultural beliefs about language and education shape attitudes toward linguistic simplification and the right to information.*

Key research tasks included: identifying perceived differences between Bulgarian and European values; assessing youth attitudes toward language simplification; analyzing the value systems behind support or resistance; and forecasting societal acceptance or resistance based on these value dynamics.

Methodologically, the study relied on an online survey of 93 journalism students at Sofia University. Quantitative results were enriched by qualitative explanations, offering insight into the underlying values influencing participants' views.

Findings reveal a complex value landscape. While young Bulgarians largely embrace European principles like inclusion, tolerance, and the right to information – supporting simplified, accessible communication – many simultaneously express concern that such efforts could undermine literacy. A prevalent belief holds that improving citizens' literacy is preferable to adjusting media language. Divergent understandings of journalistic professionalism reflect this tension: some prioritize linguistic standards, others emphasize clarity and accessibility.

The study concludes that despite openness to European democratic values, a strong attachment to traditional linguistic norms may hinder the implementation of plain language in Bulgaria. Addressing this requires balancing inclusive communication goals with respect for cultural attitudes toward language and education.

Key words: *plain language, media, traditional values, European values, accessible communication, linguistic culture.*

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ЗІТКНЕННЯ ТРАДИЦІЙНИХ І ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКИХ ЦІННОСТЕЙ У КОНТЕКСТІ КОНЦЕПЦІЇ ДОСТУПНОЇ МОВИ В МЕДІА

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Анотація. У статті досліджено взаємодію між традиційними болгарськими цінностями та європейськими орієнтирами щодо доступної мови в медіа й публічних інституціях. У центрі уваги – готовність болгарського суспільства, зокрема молоді, сприймати європейську концепцію «простого мовлення» в громадській комунікації. Аналізується вплив культурних уявлень про мову й освіту на ставлення до спрощення мовлення та реалізації права на інформацію.

Серед основних завдань дослідження такі: визначення сприйманих відмінностей між болгарськими та європейськими цінностями; вивчення ставлення молоді до мовного спрощення; аналіз ціннісних установок, що підтримують або відкидають ініціативу; прогнозування потенційної суспільної підтримки чи опору на основі конфлікту цінностей.

Методологічну основу становило онлайн-опитування 93 студентів факультету журналістики Софійського університету. Кількісні результати доповнено якісними коментарями респондентів, що дало змогу виявити глибинні ціннісні орієнтації.

Результати виявили складну картину ціннісних уявлень. Попри загальне прийняття європейських принципів – таких як інклюзія, толерантність і право на інформацію – і підтримку ідеї доступної комунікації, чимало опитаних висловлюють занепокоєння щодо можливого зниження рівня грамотності внаслідок мовного спрощення. Поширеним є переконання, що пріоритетом має бути підвищення рівня мовної культури громадян, а не адаптація мови медіа. Відмінності в уявленнях про професіоналізм журналіста також відображають цю суперечність: одні вважають головним дотримання мовних норм, інші – здатність чітко й доступно передавати складну інформацію.

У підсумку зазначається, що, попри відкритість молоді до ліберально-демократичних цінностей Європи, глибоко вкорінене уявлення про значущість мовних норм може стати бар'єром на шляху впровадження концепції простої мови в Болгарії. Для подолання цього виклику необхідно збалансувати прагнення до інклюзивної комунікації з повагою до культурних уявлень про мову, освіту й професійну компетентність.

Ключові слова: проста мова, медіа, традиційні цінності, європейські цінності, доступна комунікація, мовна культура.

Traditional vs European values. The title of the text already assumes the existence of a distinction between traditional and European values. Defending this distinction is difficult, even impossible, as many examples can be given of European values that penetrated the traditional attitudes of Bulgarians before the Middle Ages and the Renaissance [2, p. 20]. Therefore, I would suggest that traditional values be defined as values that have long been established and permanently shared in society, which Bulgarians recognize as their own, but that the contemporary value picture in our country should also be taken into account. All of them make up the overall value constellation of Bulgarians. Studies on contemporary value attitudes of Bulgarians show a stable conviction in the importance of education [5, p. 6], but mostly

for finding a job, the value of the family is traditionally high (the so-called culture of familism) [1, p. 78], trust in institutions and public systems is traditionally weak [4, p. 101; 6, p. 111–112], and tolerance is not so much understanding of others, but rather acceptance of “their right to act as they see fit” [5, p. 56], distrust of foreigners prevails [1, p. 79]. It is obvious that some of the Bulgarian traditional values have points of contact with European ones, but there are also significant differences. H. Aleksandrov notes that a culture of imitation is developing, insofar as “the perception of the values of the open global society (universal human rights, humanism, autonomy, tolerance, meritocracy, etc.) has remained superficial and declarative in recent decades” [1, p. 86]. “This is a disturbing discovery,” the author continues, “since by virtue

of membership in the European Union we have adopted social and political institutions and legal regulation inspired by these values” [1, p. 86].

European values are much more clearly articulated in EU documents. Among them are: “solidarity, the human being and self-esteem, humanism, the rule of law/equality of all before the law, political equality, equality in dignity and rights, modern science born in Europe, cultural diversity within the framework of European civilization and in the world, political pluralism, democracy, peace, etc.” [2, p. 21].

The initiative for plain language in communication with citizens. The clash of democratic European values with deep-rooted traditional understandings often leads to the rejection of a number of internationally accepted initiatives and concepts, such as the concept of accessible language. Among the reasons is the realization that these initiatives are foreign, are often imposed by institutions that have not conducted awareness-raising campaigns, and, above all, are based on values that clash with widespread understandings in the relevant community.

The main goal of plain language is to protect the right to information of all citizens. Therefore, it is envisaged to develop such a language option that ensures accessible communication: “A communication is in plain language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended readers can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information” [3].

The need for simplification (modeling) of the language is argued with the following values:

- Guaranteed right to information, social inclusion and interaction, regardless of the level of language skills and competence;
- Overcoming communicative asymmetry in different communicative situations and for different reasons: low literacy, cognitive problems, illness, immigrant background, etc.;
- Pluralism, expressed in the need to expand the audience and reach more citizens.

Attitudes towards language simplification in relation to citizens’ communication with the media. In connection with the initiative undertaken by the European institutions to develop an plain language, I conducted a survey to establish the attitudes of young Bulgarians towards such an effort in our country. The article presents the results, registering the readiness of Bulgarian society, in particular young people, to support the development and implementation

of the European concept of plain language in the institutions and the media.

The participants in the survey were 93 students in the 1st and 2nd year of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. The survey was conducted online via Google Forms.

Based on some of the respondents’ answers, I established the value repertoire within which traditionally shared values and European values clashes. This collision allows us to predict the degree of public resistance to such an initiative in Bulgaria.

Survey results. The diagrams presenting the answers to the first two questions register the attitudes of young Bulgarians towards the need to create a specially simplified language variant for communicating with all citizens and particularly with citizens with communication difficulties. The prevailing positive answers show respect for the right of all citizens to receive information that is accessible to them (see diagrams 1 and 2).

Diagram 1

Answers to the question: Do you think that the media need a specially created simplified language in order to communicate in an accessible way with absolutely all citizens? (• yes/• no)



The values behind these answers, however, are established in additional questions that ask respondents to justify their answers.

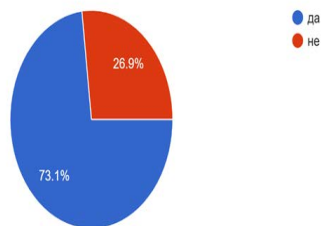
Values reflected in the argumentation of positive answers:

- Tolerance – sharing the basic European value, which implies understanding and accepting the needs of the Other;
- Inclusion of all in society – awareness of the need to include different social groups (immigrants, people with cognitive problems, people with temporary medical difficulties, poorly educated people, etc.) in the information exchange;

Diagram 2

Answers to the question: Should an even simpler language be developed for institutions and the media to communicate with citizens with difficulties in perception and understanding? (• yes/• no)

Трябва ли да се разработи още по-прост език, с който институциите и медиите да общуват с гражданите със затруднено възприятие и разбиране?
93 responses



- The right to information – awareness that information should be provided to all citizens;
- Democracy of the media – the belief that the media should be democratic and addressed to all citizens.

Respondents' answers demonstrating the values:

Information from the media and institutions must reach everyone, otherwise they simply transmit this information only to a certain group of people (Информацията от медиите и институциите трябва да достига до всички, иначе просто предават тази информация само на определена група от хора);

All people have the right to be informed (Всички хора имат право да бъдат информирани);

A large part of the people do not understand what institutions publish on their websites, but it is important because it directly affects the population. It is accepted that institutional language is complex and difficult to understand, but I think this needs to change (Голяма част от хората не разбират това, което институциите публикуват на своите сайтове, а е важно, защото засяга пряко населението. Прието е, че институционалният език е сложен и труден за разбиране, но мисля, че това трябва да се промени);

Citizens with impaired perception and understanding must also be familiar with the news, and accordingly, a way must be found to present it to them in a way that is understandable to them. (Гражданите със затруднено

възприятие и разбиране също трябва да са запознати с новините, съответно трябва да се намери начин те да им бъдат представени по разбираем за тях начин);

Sign language and subtitles can be introduced... (Жестомимичен език и субтитри може да се въведат...).

Values formulated in the argumentation of the negative answers:

– Education is a supreme value for society – one cannot “lower the level” of the media because of uneducated people, but their educational level must be increased;

– Trust in institutions – the belief that institutions should take care of all people and that a person should be able to participate directly in communication with them based on their good education and training;

– Personal responsibility for one's own life realization – an uncompromising and critical attitude towards those who have no ambition for social inclusion is reflected.

Respondents' answers demonstrating the values:

If we are talking in a medical or mental aspect YES, but if we are talking about people with a low level of education NO (Ако говорим в медицински или ментален аспект ДА, но ако говорим за хора с ниско ниво на образование НЕ);

People with impaired perception need simpler language. And the average illiterate need to be literate, not for the media to cater to them. (Хората със затруднени възприятия имат нужда от по-прост език. А средностатистическите неграмотни имат нужда да бъдат ограмотени, не медиите да се съобразяват с тях);

I don't think that if you have low literacy, the media should respect the choices of a person who hasn't been educated enough. (Не мисля, че ако имаш ниска грамотност, трябва медията да се съобрази с избор на човек, който не се е образовал достатъчно);

There's no need to drop the level any further. (Няма нужда да пада нивото повече);

I believe that vocabulary should not be simplified too much so as not to lower the average level of intelligence. (Смятам, че лексиката не бива да се опростява твърде много, за да не се понижава средното ниво на интелигентност);

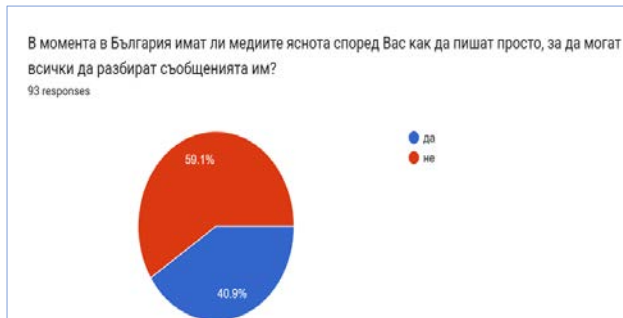
It is more urgent and meaningful to emphasize the literacy of citizens (...no-

наложително и смислено е да се наблегне на оgramотояването на гражданите).

The question, the answers to which are presented in diagram 3, examines attitudes towards media language policies and practices.

Diagram 3

Answers to the question: In your opinion, do the media in Bulgaria currently have clarity on how to write simply so that everyone can understand their messages? (• yes/• no)



It is obvious that young people do not highly value the quality of media messages in terms of clear and understandable presentation of information. The explanations of the answers outline two opposing values for the journalistic profession.

Opposing values for the professionalism of journalists:

– Professionalism is related to high linguistic culture – the opinion has been repeatedly expressed that the professional reputation of the journalist does not allow him to compromise with speech behavior and simplification of language and style. The belief that journalists must comply with literary norms, to speak “correct Bulgarian” is particularly insistently maintained.

– Professionalism is related to the ability to “translate” any content into clear and understandable language, i.e. a journalist is good at his job precisely when he manages to write and speak in plain language.

The following three questions test widely shared beliefs about how clarity and accessibility in language is achieved.

According to respondents, accessible communication is based on the following values:

– The need for clarity in communication and mutual understanding – through short expression, as well as the use of colloquial speech;

– Linguistic purism – the use of native words contributes to better understanding than the use of foreign words and terms.

Diagram 4

Answers to the question: Do you think that short sentences and words provide accessible communication? (• yes/• no)

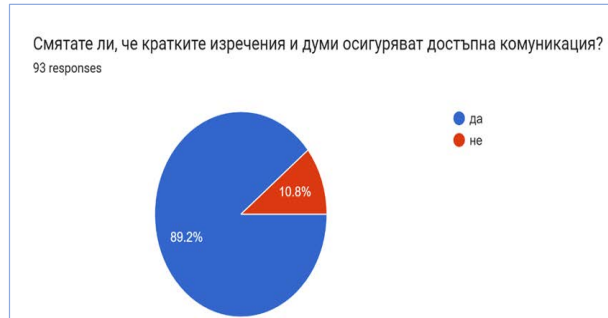


Diagram 5

Answers to the question: Do you think that the use of scientific terms and foreign words makes understanding difficult? (• yes/• no)



Diagram 6

Answers to the question: Do you think that if the media uses conversational and imitative language, they will be understood by a wider audience? (• yes/• no)



Conclusions. Attitudes in Bulgaria support linguistic modeling as a liberal strategy for including all citizens in public communication. They show awareness that information should reach everyone and be understood by everyone.

Respondents demonstrate sharing the values of liberal democracy, including tolerance for people with medical problems and for people coming from other cultures. In this sense, the disturbing conclusion of H. Alexandrov about a formed culture of imitation, in which European values are superficially and declaratively accepted by young Bulgarians, is not confirmed.

However, the results also show the presence of traditionalist values that do not tolerate illiteracy, low education and culture: (1) concerns are shared that by simplifying the language, the level of literacy will decrease; (2) it is proposed to consider strategies for literacy of citizens and reducing information, rather than simplifying the language of the media and institutions; (3) it is insisted on maintaining the requirements for citizens for high speech culture, etc. sub.

The values that affect language competence as part of the professionalism of journalists

provoke contradictions. According to one part of the respondents, a journalist must follow high language standards, according to another – high professionalism is expressed in the ability to convey information in a clear and accessible language.

Obviously, at the level of more universal values, such as tolerance, liberal democracy, the right to information, inclusion of all groups in society, young Bulgarians share European value orientations. In the area of language values, traditional beliefs are still maintained that high language culture is a mandatory factor for the professional and communicative realization of the personality. Moreover – every citizen must ensure his social inclusion himself, unless he has medical or other difficulties. This stable value attitude would delay the possible implementation of the initiative for accessible communication with citizens.

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