

Linguistic Means of News Source Reference: The Case of the Slovenian Press Agency

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SUMMARY

National and foreign news agencies represent the basic news sources for journalists. The quality journalistic discourse includes simplicity, punctuality, reliability, and objectivity of agency information.

The article examines the way Slovene news agency (STA) quotes or abbreviates opinions and attitudes of their sources. Using the linguistic-stylistic method, the authors' analyze linguistic means of referring in STA reports. Their research discovers the use of a wide range of verbs which symbolize speech, thinking and understanding, which is a consequence of the journalistic desire to avoid monotony in their texts.

Surprisingly, the use of quotation is rare, and the boundaries between author's text and quotation are unclear: it is often not clear if the information is the attitude of the source or a hidden journalistic commentary.

Journalists abbreviate their sources, use the reports of other news agencies, which consequents in double or triple referring.

The use of syntactic which expresses unreliability of an event or a situation is often redundant. This can be a result of journalistic ignorance of the consequences of using the structure, and trying to hard to mediate the information as objective as possible. In most of the cases, the user is not an "ordinary reader", but a journalist or editor who wants the latest information in the pur-

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est form. That is why news agencies usually have clear and schematized form of news writing without stylistic originality.

Key words: agency information, Slovene news agency, linguistic means of referring, schematized form of news writing

The cultural power of journalism – and any effects it may have – is rooted in its discursive status as 'truth'; its ability to mobilise belief and consent (actively or passively) through the telling of stories which are credible because they are journalistic.

(McNair, 1998: 57)

Journalists have to re-establish the status of journalistic texts' *credibility* and *believability* again and again, referring to codes of ethics and applying numerous conventions of their work, one of them being *the convention of objectivity* and *the transparent source attribution* as its constitutive element.

In this article, we are going to focus on a specific type of journalism, i.e. the news agency dispatches. Namely, national and international news agencies are journalists' basic, routinely used sources. Accuracy, reliability, impartiality, and simplicity of information which they supply are considered to be even more important, as the research studies (e.g. Van Dijk, 1988; Laban, 2004) reveal that the agency material is frequently used – or even copied without attribution – by numerous mass media.

Our intention is to research how journalists of the Slovenian news agency STA (Slovenska tiskovna agencija) quote or summarize opinions and points of view of their sources. Using the linguo-stylistic method, the linguistic means of reference in the STA's news accounts are going to be analyzed. As the deliberate selection of specific linguistic means implies the intention of journalists' communication (Kalin Golob, 2002: 31), reasons of their choices are going to be searched for and discussed.

Newsgathering and the Predominance of Routine News Sources

Newsgathering is the first stage of news production. According to McManus (1994: 95), the discovery phase of news selection is very important because it predicates all other decisions in the newsroom. News sources are central to the journalistic practice, as they are the people, places and organizations from whom news stories originate and to whom journalists turn when checking potential stories (Harcup, 2004: 44).

As there are more and more information available, discovering reliable sources is as important for journalists as discovering good ideas and relevant news. Story selection is composed of two processes; one determines *the availability* of news,

and the other *the suitability* of news (see Gans, 1980: 81–82). Journalists almost always have more available information than they can use, therefore they must make suitability judgements; they select what they can cover with limited staffs and time, and what they can report in the limited amount of air time or magazine space. To select sources and to routinize the selection, they consider sources' past suitability, productivity, reliability, trustworthiness, authoritativeness, and articulateness (Gans, 1980: 128–131).

The news agencies correspond to all the criteria listed above. Therefore, journalists use them frequently as their regular routine source. Compared to the informal and the active journalistic newsgathering channels, the routine channels are predominant in the contemporary, market driven journalism, as they are the most convenient for the routinized construction of journalistic texts (see Poler Kovačič, 2004a: 40–41; Poler Kovačič, 2004b; Gans, 2003: 52). As McManus (1994: 1) suggests, business logic permeates the newsroom; readers, viewers and a listeners are now *customers*, the news is *a product*, the circulation or signal area is now *a market*. Thus, journalism serves the market and not the public. According to Etema et al. (1997: 38), almost all news media depend for the bulk of their news content on other suppliers, selecting from among the offerings of wire services. This is because subscriptions to wire services are substantially less costly than hiring more journalists to actively dis(cover) newsworthy events (see McManus, 1994: 96),

News Agencies – Journalists' Basic Sources of Information

News agencies serve as journalists' basic news sources, as they provide them with permanent flow of news material from diverse areas of political, economic, social, and cultural life. It is the local media that depend upon the agency dispatches the most, as they can not attend many events because of a small staff, a lack of technical devices and limited financial resources.

Perovič and Šipek (1998: 55) state that the television stations are subscribed to several news agencies services; according to the authors' experiences, the agency dispatches are in most cases veracious, and the agencies do not draw distinctions between the more and the less important events. Their accounts are supposed to be up-to-date, simple and as "objective"¹ as possible. Employing a wide network of correspondents, news agencies collect and distribute information for as many subscribers as possible.² As Erjavec (1998: 65) suggests, a news agency functions as *a centre*: information from other national and/or foreign agencies flow into this centre, while at the same time it dispatches domestic information outside the national borders. Thus, a national news agency sustains important communication flow between the national and the international public.

"The flow of international news and information is largely in the hands of the big world news agencies," wrote Merrill (1983: 14) more than two decades ago, and his words remain equally valid for describing the current situation of journalism worldwide. In the Slovenian mass media, there is a tendency of reducing the number of foreign correspondents and replacing their journalistic texts with information, supplied by the world news agencies. It can be explained as a conse-

quence of the media managers' efforts to cut down the costs of journalists' work. It leads to the decline of the foreign politics news quality, as relying on four or five main agency sources can not assure the plurality of news. According to Košir (2003: 64), many mass media are subscribed to the same news agencies, and that causes the reduction of information diversity and the dissemination of uniform media images. Growing media commercialization, ownership concentration and conglomeration, the expansion of Internet, rapid progress of telecommunication and digital technologies, segmentation and the rise of new generations of media clients, and other global media trends strongly influence the development of agency journalism and its changes in the economical and professional sense (Boyd-Barrett, 2000). As secretary-general of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Aidan White (in Grah, 2002: 10) points out, the world agencies work under same pressures to reduce costs as the other media, and through these agencies, the low quality of work spreads from one place to the network of low quality.

The largest world news agencies like *Reuters* (founded in 1849), the American *United Press International* (UPI), the French *Agence France Presse* (AFP), the American *Associated Press* (AP), and the German *Deutsche Press Agentur* (dpa) cover global news. In Slovenia, domestic news is covered by the Slovenian news agency STA, founded on June 20th 1991. The STA has become the national news agency; it is covering events in the country as well as abroad with both its own and foreign sources. According to their web site presentation,³ the STA is a member of the *European Association of Press Agencies* and exchanges reports with 14 foreign news agencies. It has permanent offices in Brussels, New York, Rome, Vienna, Zagreb, and Belgrade; important events elsewhere in the world are often covered by correspondents who are dispatched to the scene.⁴

Beside the STA's general news service, the announcements of domestic, European and other Slovenia-related international events are in daily use among the Slovenian journalists. The common practice and the routine work of news editors is that in the beginning of a working day, they check on the STA server once more which events are on that day's agenda, and where they should send their journalists, photographers, and television cameras. Moreover, the agency dispatches serve as an important source of ideas for further journalistic processing; they are a kind of a springboard for some extensive thematic articles. At the same time, they are mediators of the so called *background information*.

Convention of Journalistic "Objectivity" and its Rules

Inside the journalistic community, there is the consensus about news that takes shape within a framework of shared values, the so called *journalist's creed*. It consists of many elements, one of them being *the conventions* of the journalistic work (Sigal, 1973: 65). When a journalist chooses among information and stories, "there are no objective standards here, there are conventions" (Lippmann, 1922/1999: 223), which rationally justify what journalists routinely do at processing information. They help to standardize content and reduce the scope of journalists' uncertainty by providing standards for selecting news. They in fact *routinize certitude*, regardless of their validity (Sigal, 1973: 66).

One of such customary ways of thinking about news is the *convention of journalistic objectivity*. Even though the concept involves many difficulties and dilemmas, it remains a fundamental norm of journalistic practice in most democratic states (see McManus, 1994: 143). According to McNair, the claim of objectivity is essentially “an appeal for trust” (1998: 65); it is a *guarantee of quality control*, asking us to believe that what is being said is valid. Objectivity is reinforced by necessity – “the need to protect journalistic credibility” (Gans, 1980: 186); if journalists were not viewed as objective, every story could be criticized as resulting from bias, and the news would be distrusted even more than is now the case. The objectivity norm helps journalists to reproduce their news accounts’ discursive status as “truth”, to gain and to preserve credibility and the public’s confidence. As Splichal (1999: 275–276) suggests: “The public’s confidence in information gatherers and disseminators became a major factor in (mass) communication processes because of barriers that exist between information and the public.” It is *the illusion of truth* (Van Dijk, 1988: 86) that is at stake in the rhetoric of news discourse, and it can be reproduced precisely by the convention of objectivity, despite recognizing the multidimensional nature of truth.

Which rules or criteria apply to the ideal of journalistic objectivity? According to Splichal (2001: 8001), the growing number of journalistic codes of ethics since the beginning of the 20th century to mark the professional standards in journalism has never resulted in a single code that would universally define the standard of objectivity. McNair (1998: 68) identifies three *rules of objectivity*: the separation of fact from opinion, providing balanced accounts of a debate, and the validation of journalistic statements by reference to authoritative others. Shoemaker and Reese (1996: 113) argue that attributing statements to sources is a key element of the objectivity ritual. Meyer (1987: 50–52) describes four *pragmatic rules of objectivity*:

1. *The Attribution Rule*: Journalists are required to give the source for every fact in a story, whenever it is not obvious. Thus they let their readers know how much credulity to put into each statement. Yet the rule can be dangerous when applied compulsively; it can lead journalists to forget their responsibility to go behind the sources and make an independent check.
2. *The Get-the-Other-Side-of-the-Story Rule*: Journalists are expected to include other points of view whenever they exist. This rule tends to a story pattern in which there are always two points of view, yet reality is often quite different. When a journalist assumes a model with only two contrasting views, some viewpoints in a complicated situation are inevitably going to get lost. Another assumption of this rule is that both sides are equally credible. The rule also involves the right to reply: whenever a person or an institution is criticized, the editor must routinely assure the opportunity to respond. If the person can not be located or refuses to respond, readers should be informed that an attempt was made.
3. *The Equal-Space Rule*: Conflicting groups should be given equal space in the newspaper. This solution is very simplistic which becomes obvious when, for example, one of the candidates in an election campaign is clearly less newsworthy than the other.

4. *The Equal-Access Rule*: The equal-space rule deals with news the newspaper actively seeks; its passive counterpart is the equal-access rule which holds that all interests in a community should have an equal opportunity to have their views made known through the media.

Transparency of News Sources

Transparency of news sources is one of the key criteria of quality of a journalistic text (Erjavec, 1999; Fröhlich, 1992; Schröter, 1992; Mencher, 1991). Any material that appears in the news columns “must be attributable to a news source” (Sigal, 1973: 66). As defined in Article 4 of the *Code of Ethics of the Slovenian Journalists* (2002), a journalist “should identify the source whenever feasible. The public is entitled to know the source if it is to appraise the significance and credibility of information”. Journalists’ duty to make the news sources transparent in their accounts is written in numerous international documents as well as in the national codes of ethics in the democratic states. The Article 3 of the *IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists* (1964/1986) suggests that a journalist “shall report only in accordance with facts of which he/she knows the origin”. The Article 4 of the *Code of Honour of Croatian Journalists (Kodeks časti hrvatskih novinara)*, for example, states that journalists are obliged to express truthful, balanced and verified information, and to identify persons or institutions being sources of information or statements.

In a case of a journalist being an eyewitness to an event, his/her knowledge derives from his/her firsthand experience; the public’s trust to his/her report is based on the fact that an event has happened in a world within his/her reach: from ‘there’, from his/her position in time and place, it has been possible to observe the objects and to live through the events, as the sociologist Alfred Schutz (1987: 1643) explains. Anything (relevant) that could not be seen or heard by a journalist on the spot of an event has to be accessible and verifiable to media readers (viewers/listeners) in some other way. The source can be the immediate experience of another person, who is not necessarily an eyewitness; Schutz calls him/her *a participant*, and a reader puts trust in his/her report on the presumption that “a participant ‘knows better’” (ibid.).

A reader has a right to know how information has been gathered, what types of information have been used by journalists, as journalistic texts influence his/her perception of the reality. As Soloski (1989: 864) points out: “/H/ow reporters gather news and the types of sources they use are important to study because they determine not only what information is presented to the public, but what image of society is presented”.

According to Article 11 of the *Code of Ethics of the Slovenian Journalists* (2002), a journalist “should distinguish news from commentary. A distinction between a factual report and commentary should be clearly defined”. As suggested in the *Council of Europe Resolution 1003 on the Ethics of Journalism* (1993), a clear distinction must be drawn between news and opinions: “Although opinions are necessarily subjective and therefore cannot and should not be made subject to the criterion of truthfulness, we must ensure that opinions are expressed honestly

and ethically. /.../ Opinions taking the form of comments on events or actions relating to individuals or institutions should not attempt to deny or conceal the reality of the facts or data.” Opinions are, of course, diverse. In democracy, we can not accept the requirement to prove the truthfulness of ideas, beliefs and value judgements; the ideological pluralism is recognized also by the European Court of Human Rights (Encabo, 1995: 522). Even though we can not require the opinions to be truthful, honesty and the respect of ethical frameworks are to be expected.

Journalists win their readers’ confidence by citing sources correctly, and their news accounts gain credibility; the transparent indication of a source lets a reader know that the source is credible and competent, and that it should be trusted. It is precisely *a news source’s competence* that a reader is supposed to trust the most when reading a journalistic text, Košir (2003: 97–98) suggests. Journalists cite different sources to ensure “veracity” of their accounts. The use of sources “who may be quoted as offering truth-claims is converted into a technical device designed to distance the reporter from phenomena identified as facts” (Tuchman, 1978: 95).⁵

Accuracy, credibility and neutrality of information, supplied by the news agencies, are considered to be that more important, as the agency material is frequently used (or even copied) by numerous mass media. Results of research studies in news production (see Van Dijk, 1988: 125–136), comparing source texts and final news articles, indicate that news agency dispatches tend to be reproduced rather closely, if not literally. The content analysis of television news reports in the Slovenian public television (see Laban, 2004) reveals that news agency material has not been used only as a starting-point for journalists’ own news accounts, but has been often merely copied and a source not attributed, even when journalists themselves have attended the events. The ethical disputability of such practice is not going to be discussed in this article, yet it can be understood as another cogent argument why respecting rules of the quality journalism is that much important for the news agencies’ journalists. It may happen that their inaccuracies and other bad professional decisions are reproduced in the numerous media news accounts.

Linguistic Means of Reference in the Slovenian Press Agency Dispatches

The linguistic means of reference in 378 news dispatches of the Slovenian press agency STA, from August 22nd till August 28th 2005, have been analysed by the linguo-stylistic analytically-synthetic method.⁶ The selected sample comprises texts from eight chosen categories: Parliament, European Union,⁷ Slovenian economy, Chronicle, Slovenian domestic policy, Slovenian foreign policy, Education, and Health service.

Referring to, or describing the circumstances in which the journalist aims to provide the data on where and from whom he or she has received the information, the reporting stylistics describes as broadening of the news sample (Kalin Golob, 2003: 89). The journalist couldn’t have found out everything he reports off just by attending all events for his addressees. The data used in his/her reports must have derived from another source of information. “The journalist can, to his addressee,

in exchange for his 'confidence' when providing the data which can not be verified by the addressee, grant only the guarantee that the data can be relied on" (Korošec, 1998: 196). Such guarantees are mediated through set phrases which in practice assume several linguistic forms.

In STA's texts, a wide palette of stating, thinking and perception verbs has developed as a part of setting phrases.⁸ The most common among those verb are *tell* (*povedati*), *emphasise* (*poudariti*) and *say* (*dejati*), while the choice and the frequency of their usage depends on the coverage domain. When reporting events in relation to the European Union, the STA's journalists mainly refer to the foreign press **agencies'** releases and therefore most frequently use the verb *report*.

Set phrase as the main sentence

Journalist stating that the information was given from someone else, using a form in which data about the source is in the main sentence, followed by relevant dependent sentence, is the oldest and most frequent way of news release by ascription automatism. (Kalin Golob, 2003: 95). As we have shown in our analysis, ascription automatism in a form of a main sentence followed by relevant dependent sentence are most used in all categories. Verbs mentioned before can be found in the place of ascription automatism – 3rd person singular or plural if they follow the subject; 3rd person plural or with the morpheme *se* when the source of information is not explicitly named.

*President of Social Democrats Borut Pahor, while attending a meeting of members and sympathizers of party county council of Celje, **stated that** Slovenia needs radical structural changes.*

(STA, 27. 8. 2005)

Although ascription automatism, with a verb in 1st person plural referring to the concept of editorial staff in general, can be found more often every day in radio and television reporting, as well as in journals (Korošec, 1998: 202), it is not the case with agency journalism – in our analysis we found only one example of such ascription.

As we have already reported, during today's press conference Gaber assessed that the content of recently found archives on principal nomination in five elementary schools during his ministerial mandate, showed that issues of "unappointment" were not politically motivated.

(STA, 26. 8. 2005)

Closest to this kind of source naming is the use of predicate attribute *for STA* in the place of ascription automatism, which occurs in nearly every example of journalist's attempt to emphasise that the information was obtained from his/hers active channels. This kind of behaviour in agency journalism, because it relies on foreign press agencies and Slovenian and foreign media, became more an exception, instead of a rule.

Police authorities declared for STA that the case is still being investigated.
(STA, 23. 8. 2005)

Sat phrase as the associated sentence

An example for ascription automatism in journalism is quoting a text or parts of a text written by another author. When a reporter says that he or she is not the author of the whole text, he must clearly distinguish which parts of the text are his or her and which are not (Korošec, 1998: 208).

Associated sentence in STA texts usually follows after the exact quote labeled by quotation marks or, more often, after indicating the source. A form for ascription has been made, in which concerned sentence with the mentioned source can be found also at the end of the text, not only at its beginning. In the initial associated sentence, STA journalists often quote foreign press agencies (for example, *according to X, as X reports*), repetitively, and always in the last sentence.

Frequent use of associated sentence is the consequence of written media, requested complete source identification and a tendency to clarity, without any creativity; for this purpose, associated sentence that enables fast reading and source identification, is the most appropriate one. This is of great importance for the addressee, i.e. the reader, who usually is not just an ordinary reader but a journalist who wants to gain new information as soon as possible in order to pass them on through the radio, television or a web page, in a more or less creative way.

“Differences in opinions are not insuperable,” said Laridžani after meeting with El Baradej.
(STA, 26. 8. 2005)

In this quotation form, double or even triple quoting can occur, because the text is usually taken from another foreign press agency.

“The new suspects are a part of a group of 10 to 15 people,” the police spokesman stated for one of the Norwegian radio stations, according to the German press agency dpa.
(STA, 22. 8. 2005)

Consistency in quoting a source – as the following example shows – often leads to satiety, intricacy and somewhat difficult understanding of the text.

Europe should combine forces in the fight against fire, especially by organizing firefighting units, said the Portuguese minister of inner affairs Antonio Costa in the interview for Europe 1 radio station today, according to the French news agency AFP.
(STA, 22. 8. 2005)

Because of the need for routine and scheme in journalism, and because of respect for addressee and purpose of news reporting – prompt, simple, comprehen-

sive, truthful and understandable presentment of the facts concerning domestic and foreign events to the journalists, editors and foreign press agencies – certain sentences or paragraphs explaining an event are being repeated in other texts, and in that way literal forms for ascription are being repeated as well. The job of press agencies is to promptly publish every new detail about an event and by doing so complete the story, presuming its known background. Because of this text repetition, the authorship of some journalists becomes questionable, and the possibility of making a mistake increases because journalists do not check out the work of their forerunner.

Nevertheless, some journalists use specific stylistic figures that rose from quoting or reading of the quoted. This especially refers to verbs of stating, thinking and perception during the use of direct or indirect speech. We claim that the main reason for this variety of verbs is an attempt to overcome monotony and create an impression of eloquence.

Regarding to the quality of journalism, a problem occurs when STA journalists, according to our analysis, more often use compression than direct or indirect speech. Because of specific characteristics of agency journalism we expected that journalist would avoid this compression and more often use direct quoting that would be more useful for other journalists using the same text. In most cases, the problem was the compression of the text, which leaves the journalist with only two options: publishing the unchanged text or compress the text even more. In any case, they are forced to believe the accuracy and impartiality of text reconstitution.

The biggest problem for the addressees reading the text are cases in which the associated sentence holding the information about the source is being quoted after the compression or after misquotation, because they do not have all the information about the source (Kalin Golob, 2003: 95–96).

Most Slovenians have agricultural roots, as we can see today and that is something we can be proud of. Agriculture is one of the most important sectors in the country, and despite the globalisation, every nation depends on its own food production for survival, said Janša.

(STA, 27. 8. 2005)

A problem occurs when in a part of a text, which is not author's, some words express praise and are being understood as author's own opinion – until the source of information is named. Many journalists try to avoid such misunderstandings by using partial compression; when quoting a word or a phrase they emphasize that the speaker used this precise word or a phrase, especially if it has a strong subjective meaning.

“Some unusual business praxis” has been discovered in Bados Consulting deal.

(STA, 23. 8. 2005)

During the early election manifestation in Germany, Fischer stated out that Turkey “lies in the center of our safety” and that the resistance to her EU membership is “criminally blind”.

(STA, 23. 8. 2005)

Because of insecurity some journalists often use compression in a wrong way. Too often or unnecessary use of quotation marks makes the text difficult to read and inefficient. As Cappon (2000: 71) emphasizes, “/a/n indiscriminate rage to quote, or perhaps a sense of insecurity, traps writers into pointless fragmentary quotes, consisting of one or two unremarkable words used in their ordinary sense”. In this case the addressee is focused on the meaning of the text between the quotation marks, instead of the content of the text.

Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced on Wednesday that Iran wants to bring an end to negotiations regarding its nuclear programme and that it prepares “novelties” for settling a dispute with the international community. Ahmadinejad emphasized once again that Iran must above all protect its “legal rights” to develop nuclear technology. He gave his assurances that Iran “wishes to continue negotiations” ...

(STA, 26. 8. 2005)

Set phrase as the dependent sentence

When the source of information is being named, above mentioned verbs with comparative conjunction *kot ('as')* (Kalin Golob, 2003: 93, 96–97) often occur in ascription automatism. Dependant sentence with the named source can be the first, followed by the main sentence:

As Naglič explained, coordination of agricultural parcels usage was conducted along with grant consigning.

(STA, 24. 8. 2005)

We found many examples of double or triple quoting during this analysis, and some of the cases are very unusual and misleading to the addressee. He is, in fact, convinced that he found out who is the source of information at the beginning, not knowing until the end of the text that he is really reading a quotation from a foreign press agency.

As Bulgarian media reported today, according to the assessment of the Bulgarian Ministry of Finances this year floods have caused a 435 million euro damage, said German news agency dpa.

(STA, 25. 8. 2005)

Set phrase as insertion

Ascription automatism with comparative conjunction *kot* ('as') can be used in the middle of the sentence, as insertion (separated by comma or a dash), i.e. as inserted sentence (Kalin Golob, 2003: 93). Korošec (1998: 282) considers that the expression *insertion* includes everything between the dashes, in the widest meaning.

*During the press conference milk bonuses were discussed because some of the consultants, **as the union of farmers pointed out**, did not know that an X-sign must be made in the application form in order to get the bonus.*

(STA, 24. 8. 2005)

The fact that a journalist can choose in which part of the text he wants to use the insertion, to name the source of information, shows that he can use this insertion to emphasize and comment a certain part of the text belonging to his source, but also to distance from the quotation he does not agree with.

*Solyom did not want to comment this question because, **as he said**, Hungary did not have any official information about Austrian elongation of the transitional period.*

(STA, 26. 8. 2005)

Insertion is often used as a way to emphasize direct quotation of a phrase used by a source, in order to avoid objection about the text being subjective or partial. We often find cases where the journalist mentions his source by using an inserted sentence with a conjunction *as*, and loses the verb of stating, thinking or perception. It seems that *as* is used instead of assertion automatism *as he says*, *as he feels* ... but in the same time this structure has a certain sound of irony coming from the journalist, meaning *at least as he/she says*.

*Because, **as Naglič says**, land register in Slovenia is unsatisfactory, not updated and in that way it does not give the right impression of the parcel situation, Ministry for Agriculture was given an order from the European commission to adjust the facts with the real situation.*

(STA, 24. 8. 2005)

Set phrase as preposition

When ascribing the source, preposition *according to* + *possessive attribute* + *noun* is an often used form, for example, *according to the opinion (words, prognosis, guarantees, expectations) of XY*, *according to Ys opinion (words, prognosis, guarantees)*, and in the upcoming text *according to his/hers opinion, prognosis, guarantees*.

According to the French press agency AFP, negotiation between France and China will start on Thursday.

(STA, 24. 8. 2005)

The two parties will closely cooperate in the campaign; according to Gantar's words, total costs will be between 4 and 4.5 million tolar.

(STA, 25. 8. 2005)

As the next example shows, this form (preposition + attribute + noun) is also used, as assertion automatism, for pointing out common, unofficial or official sources of information that don't want to be named, and because of that are not visible in the text. On linguistic level, what is surprising is the use of declarative sentences when reporting about an event or a fact.

European Union and China did not make any progress in their negotiation about the export of Chinese fabrics into European countries, and according to our sources, the negotiation will continue throughout the evening.

(STA, 26. 8. 2005)

According to the expectations, the government should discuss the new law on Thursday.

(STA, 23. 8. 2005)

Set phrases for the expression of unreliability with regard to the reported event

Journalists use established set phrases for the expression of unreliability (Korošec, 1998: 202–203). At the language level, certain words, word combinations and morphemic expressions are used to express that something is unproven, uncertain or unofficial (Korošec, 1998: 203; Kalin Golob, 2003: 120–131).

A morphemic expression of the state of being non-proven

Journalism developed a morphemic expression of the state of being non-proven, i.e. the form *naj bi* + *-l* participle (Korošec, 1998: 33–42, 203–205), to meet a particular journalistic need (e.g. *naj bi ukradel – is alleged to have stolen*; *naj bi kmalu obiskal Slovenijo – is expected to visit Slovenia soon*). It is a *journalistic styleme*, a special form that is neither predicative, nor conditional, nor imperative, but rather a hybrid; Korošec (1998: 204; 2004) terms it *ne-povednik* (“non-predicate”).⁹ Most of such examples in the STA's reports have been found in the category *Slovenian economy*.

Expression of supposition: use of the form *is, are* + *participle*, expresses suspicion in someone else's reliance.

*Planned measures **are expected to ensure** Slovenia's readiness for Shengen evaluation in the beginning of 2006.*

(STA, 25. 8. 2005)

Use of such form is exaggerated or unnecessary in some cases; journalists use it more often every day, without distinguishing between the need to emphasize that it's only an assumption (when facts were not confirmed with different sources of information) and the use of the morpheme *is, are + participle*, when the journalist doesn't suspect the truthfulness of the story but the reliance of the person giving the information.

*Mura water level has grown further in the morning and during the day and it was 471 centimetre at 13 pm with the flow of 1,344 cubic meters per second, according to the Environment agency of Slovenia in Gornja Radgona, which is, **allegedly**, highest level in the last 50 years.*

(STA, 22. 8. 2005)

Use of this morpheme is sometimes completely incorrect and appears with the use of indirect speech, what becomes hardly understandable for the addressee:

*Ministry **should also strive** for the "respect of untouchable rights of all the shareholders, no matter how many shares do they have, and for achieving the market price for their shares as the only fair one".*

(STA, 26. 8. 2005)

Expressing an assumption by using the form *is, are + participle* often comes with the word *allegedly/supposedly* used as an adverb. Although it is only suitable as an attribute, journalists with this foreign use protect themselves from accusations of offensive insulting, says Korošec (2004: 25–26).

*In those cases, collectives **should have, supposedly, supported** the candidate for principle, like in the case of Beltinci and Majda Vrhovnik, but the minister, **supposedly, did not give** his consent, said Zver after Gaber's statements.*

(STA, 26. 8. 2005)

Expression of unofficial (unconfirmed) information: In journalism the pattern *naj bi + -l* participle is also used for expression of unofficial or unconfirmed information, which is particularly common in diplomatic or political affairs (Korošec, 1998: 203). The reporter often refers to someone else who described the event as possible, but not officially confirmed yet (Kalin Golob, 2003: 124).

*German minister of inner affairs Otto Schily (SPD) and Bavarian ministry president Edmund Stoiber (CSU) **are supposed to check** the conditions from the air today and Stoiber **should visit** the place himself and meet with the rescuers.*

(STA, 24. 8. 2005)

We often encounter the use of this same form in different concept, not only for expression of insecurity or demand, what can be seen in the following example (it an example of introducing changes in the Law of elementary education):

*External tests **should only serve** as additional information for the students, parents and teachers, and the results **should help** the country planning educational policy.*

(STA, 28. 8. 2005)

Morpheme *is, are + participle* is sometimes used in combination with other articles expressing assumption or doubt, which leads to unnecessary repetition of presumption/ unconfirmness/unofficiality.

*According to today's edition of business daily Finance, the brewery **should be, unofficially**, prepared to sell its shares and probably also the shares of cooperate companies (together more than 52 percent) in Delo.*

(STA, 24. 8. 2005)

Following use of morphemic expression of insecurity together with an article expressing security is completely wrong and misleading.

*In Gibraltar, with the population of almost 30,000, Mobitel **is surely supposed to develop** the third generation of phones, as Delo unofficially reports.*

(STA, 25. 8. 2005)

Expression of unproven information: The pattern *naj bi + -l* participle is frequently used when reporting on alleged misdemeanours or criminal offences. As in democratic states a suspected individual is considered innocent until proven otherwise (*presumption of innocence*), a journalist can not report using the predicative mood (Korošec, 1998: 40) until the guilt is legally proven and confirmed.

*According to the Maribor municipal committee of SDS, mentioned business relations are suspected for corruption, **as** Pukšič was **suspected for breaking** the law of management, of public ordering, of corruption and of public affairs.*

(STA, 27. 8. 2005)

Expression of unreliability by using specific words or word combinations

Even though Korošec (1998: 205) emphasizes that expression of unreliability by using specific words or word combinations is clearer than the morphemic expression, it is rarely used in the news agency journalism. Analysing the STA's dispatches, no example of the particle *menda* (supposedly) has been found, and only a few examples *morda* (maybe), that are rarely seen in the expression of unreliability by using specific words, because that is "authors estimation of event or

situation possibility, or the author has taken the estimation from another source, without informing the addressee” (Korošec, 1998: 205).

*Meteorologists are warning that Katrina could turn back towards the land after crossing over “the pot” and **maybe** convince the home owners at the shore that life in the inland, although maybe deprived of a nice sea view, could be safer and easier, without the need to move every few weeks.*

(STA, 26. 8. 2005)

Assertion with specification

In assertion with specification, used only by a few STA reporters, the reporter marks certain parts of the text as non-authors by – although he includes them in his text – separating them from his own text with a word *da* (*because*) which combines a verb with a conjunction. This technique enables the reporter to include the parts of someone else’s text in his own text in the same way as if he would use quotation of direct speech, although it is not so because he made some changes that are not marked as direct speech (Korošec, 1998: 206–207).

In agency journalism examples of specification with the form *because allegedly* are used more often and can be considered as expression of unreliability by using specific words or a form of assertion with specification, “when unreliability is limited to the part of the text written by another author” (Korošec, 1998: 206).

*German distributors importing from China will lose “fair amounts of money”, he explained, while blaming the German government **because** they did not, **allegedly**, protect national interests in Brussels.*

(STA, 26. 8. 2005)

Impression of emphasizing certain parts of the text and making comments can be achieved also by using the verbs of stating with “more powerful” meaning – for example *claim* instead of *say*, or in the previous example *accuse*.

As it can be seen in the following example, both ways of assertion with specification can occur in the same sentence.

*He refused the offer because he is, **allegedly**, just fighting for the truth because his district council asked him to do so, because as a consequence of poor leadership so called Hungarians from Goričko are considered second grade citizens.*

(STA, 25. 8. 2005)

We finish the list and analysis of assertion automatisms used in mentioned STA texts with one of the surprisingly frequently used examples of reported interview which is, according to Korošec (1998: 213–216) a report of an interview, i.e. information about a conversation, and thus a form of a report:

Answering a journalist question about Slovenian interest for an agreement considering fixing the state borders with Croatia, **Vlačić said** that an agreement shall be considered “if no political solution appears in the near future”.

(STA, 22. 8. 2005)

Conclusion

Accuracy, credibility, and neutrality of the agency dispatches are of great importance, as the news agencies are recognized to be journalists' basic, permanent and the most routine sources of information. However troublesome the concept of objectivity is in journalism studies as well as in every-day journalistic practice, the norm of objective news endures to be most desired by the news agencies' subscribers. One of the key elements of *the objectivity ritual* is the transparent source attribution.

In linguistic-stylistic analysis, we made a list of assertion automatisms used by STA journalists. We found a variety of accretion forms, but the most frequently used form is the one in which automatisms occur in main sentence, with the verb in 3rd person singular or plural, or in associated sentence. We counted 71 different verbs of stating, thinking and perception which are a part of assertion automatism forms, i.e. “linguistic form created under the influence of the most important objective stylistic factor – the same, similar, repetitive circumstance that needs to be marked again every day in journalistic text” (Kalin Golob, 2003: 89). It seems that the use of such large number of verbs is a consequence of journalists' desire to avoid monotony and to achieve eloquence – one verb is rarely repeated in the same text, and after all journalists are stylistically forced to avoid repetition. On the other hand, it is a rare opportunity for journalists to develop an original style because speed, timing and simplicity of the text are more important than originality and deep analysis, for press agencies trying to please a wide circle of consumers with more and more reports and news.

Because of agency journalism specificity, we expected the analysis to show how direct or indirect speech is used most frequently, but it is used quite rarely in STA texts. Even than, inconsistent distinguishing between authors and non-authors part of the text can be seen, which can be misleading to the addressee because the objectivity of the source of information and the subjectivity of the author often remain unclear. Although news carriers are mostly journalists and editors receiving the information from press agencies, and together with the information they have received from other sources combine them in their own articles, analysis has shown that in STA text information compression prevails. In this form journalists often use reports from other, foreign press agencies or media what leads to double or triple assertion.

Within the assertion automatisms, morpheme expression of unreliability most frequently occurs relying to reliability and certainty of an event or situation, while expression of unreliability by using certain words is very rare. Journalists often use, together with the morpheme *should + infinitive* which includes unreliability as well as quotation, a few assertion prepositions in the main, dependant or associated part of the sentence creating unnecessary double quotation. The use of mor-

pheme *is, are + participle* in STA texts is often completely unnecessary and exaggerated, what is the result of ignorance for its correct use and of journalists wish to be as objective as they can in bringing foreigner information, but the effect is exactly the opposite.

Instead of expressing how an event is not official and a criminal act or assumption not proven while quoting someone else's opinion, and by using certain linguistic form perhaps express doubt in reliance of the information, the use of morpheme *is, are + participle*, has become too often – especially for journalists from other media – an excuse to write just about anything, without any, even unofficial but reliable, source of information that doesn't want to be named. The addressee can not get anything useful from this kind of reporting, especially data about the source of information used by the journalist, or at least journalist's guarantee that the source is reliable, although not visible in the text.

ENDNOTES:

- 1 We have used the quotation marks to indicate that the concept of objectivity should not be understood in an absolute sense. Full objectivity can never be achieved; it is an ideal that journalists (should) strive for.
- 2 According to Boyd-Barrett (2000: 6), "the future opens up the possibility of delivery of information services, not just to media, but direct to millions if not billions of clients", because of the new computer technologies and the Internet expansion.
- 3 See <http://www.sta.si/en/podjetje.php>, 31. 5. 2006.
- 4 The STA service is produced by nearly one hundred employees and part-time workers. It is a limited liability company in mixed state and private ownership, managed by a group of partners (Kocijančič, 2001: 103). The agency's dependence on the state subventions represents a threat to the independence of its content and to the maintenance of journalistic credibility. On the other hand, aspirations for the increased sale of its information services can lead to the commercialization of its contents.
- 5 However, research studies (e.g. Kalin Golob, 2004) confirm that stringing together quotes or forming a mosaic from the statements of one or more politicians, can be a kind of manipulation: the selection of quotes that assign a negative value to the statements of a particular politician is done so as to express an opinion of a journalist. Quotation can provide a kind of alibi to journalists, allowing them to pass on responsibility for what is said to others.
- 6 A big sample in a short period of time is the consequence of the news agencies' specific nature: to meet the needs of the largest number of subscribers possible, they provide such extensive services on a daily basis that no subscriber can use at full.
- 7 There are fewer texts in the Parliament category than usual, for the reason of the chosen time framework (August). Namely, it was a time of the parliamentary recess.
- 8 We made a list of 71 verbs (in infinitive and alphabetical order): argumentirati, bati se, biti x (kritičen, nezadovoljen, ogorčen, prepričan), dejati, dodati, dvomiti, izjaviti, izpostaviti, izraziti x (dvom, mnenje, nasprotovanje, (ne)pripravljenost, (ne)razumevanje, (ne)zadovoljstvo, podpora, prepričanje, pričakovanje, razočaranje, sožalje, upanje, zaskrbljenost, željo), izreči, komentirati, meniti, nadaljevati, nakazati, napisati, napovedati, navesti, objaviti, obsojati, obtožiti, obveščati, oceniti, očitati, odgovoriti, odvrniti, odzvati se, omeniti, opominjati, opozoriti, označiti (za), pisati, po + vir + biti (besedah, informacijah, mnenju, napovedih, navedbah, ocenah, podatkih, pojasnilih, poročanju, prepričanju, pričakovanjih, ugotovitvah, zagotovilih, zatrjevanju), pojasniti, pokazati, ponoviti, poročati, posvariti, potrditi, poudariti,

povedati, povzeti, pozdraviti, pozvati, praviti, predlagati, pričakovati, pripomniti, priporočiti, pristaviti, reči, skleniti, spomniti, sporočiti, spraševati, strinjati se, svetovati, trditi, ugotavljati, utemeljiti, videti (kot), vprašati se, vztrajati, zagotoviti, zahtevati, zaključiti, zanikati, zanimati, zapisati, zatrditi, zavedati se, zavzeti se. We emphasize that the list isn't final, because of the short period of time.

- 9 This is a stylistic form in Slovenian language which doesn't exist in English language; the closest to its meaning is the form *should* (for future tense) or *did + infinitive* (for past tense). But we used different translation sometimes, in order to preserve the meaning of the sentence. Because of that, wherever this form is being used, both English and Slovenian version is mentioned.
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Lingvističke metode navodenja izvora vijesti: Primjer Slovenska novinska agencija

SAŽETAK

Domaće i strane novinske agencije predstavljaju novinarima osnovne izvore vijesti. Zato je za kvalitetan novinarski diskurs važna jednostavnost, točnost, pouzdanost i nepristranost agencijskih informacija.

Ovaj članak daje pregled kako Slovenska tiskovna agencija (STA) citira ili sažima mišljenja i stajališta svojih izvora. Koristeći lingvističko-stilističku metodu, autori analiziraju lingvistička sredstva referiranja u izvještajima STA. Njihovo istraživanje otkriva uporabu širokog raspona glagola koji označavaju govor, razmišljanje i shvaćanje, za što se može reći da je posljedica pokušaja novinara da izbjegnu monotoniju ponavljanja i pišu tekstove življim jezikom.

Ono što iznenađuje jest da je uporaba upravnog govora dosta rijetka, a ima i nedosljednosti u jasnom razgraničavanju autorskog dijela teksta i onoga koji to nije: naime, često nije jasno je li informacija stajalište izvora vijesti ili prikriveni komentar novinara.

Novinari uglavnom sažimaju izjave izvora vijesti, pozivajući se na izvještaje drugih novinskih agencija i medijskih organizacija, a posljedica je dvostruko ili čak trostruko referiranje (često je nejasno ili se teško razumije).

Uporaba sintaktičke strukture kojom se izražava nepouzdanost u svezi s nekim događajem ili stanjem, često je suvišna ili pretjerana. To se može shvatiti kao neznanje novinara o pravilnoj uporabi te strukture i pretjerana briga da se citati prenesu što je moguće "objektivnije". U većini slučajeva korisnik agencijskih tekstova nije "obični čitatelj", nego novinar ili urednik koji želi najnoviju informaciju u najčišćem obliku. To je razlog zbog čega novinske agencije obično imaju jasne i shematizirane načine pisanja teksta bez stilističke originalnosti.

Ključne riječi: agencije izvor informacija, Slovenska tiskovna agencija, lingvistička sredstva referiranja, shematizirani načini pisanja