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How to analyse media communication? - the recipient's perspective

ABSTRACT

The article analyses the process of reception in public communication mediated through mass media. It concentrates on the relationships between the message and the recipient. Of the three possible ways of understanding those relationships one was chosen, according to which the meaning of a message comes into being through the interaction between the message and the recipient. This model of communication assumes that communication effectiveness largely depends on the recipient and on the (broadly understood) context.

> *Reading is not akin to using can opener to reveal the meanings of the message.*
> *Meanings are produced in interactions between the text and the audience.*
>
> John Fiske, *Introduction to communication studies*

The notion of media communication which appears in the title of this article can be understood in two ways: firstly, as all manifestations of communication between people that is conducted via media (mediatised communication[1]); secondly, as public communication mediated through mass media (this involves both mediatisation and medialisation[2] of the message). In my further reflection, I will mainly focus on the second meaning of the notion, bearing in mind that public communication differs from interpersonal one.

The article attempts to answer the following research questions:

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[1] For more on mediatisation see e.g. T. Sasińska-Klas, *Mediatyzacja a medializacja sfery publicznej* [Mediatisation and medialisation of the public sphere], "Zeszyty Prasoznawcze" [Press research issues] 2014, no. 2, pp. 162–175.

[2] On the distinction between mediatisation and medialisation see ibidem, pp. 172-173.

- How to investigate media communication to taking into account both the specificities of communication as such, and the specificities of (the constantly changing) media which mediate in this communication?

- How to investigate media communication so as to - without losing sight of the entire communication process - focus on the uniqueness of the media reader/listener/spectator and his receptive activities?

- How to analyse media communication in order to determine the extent to which the effectiveness of this communication depends on the recipient?

(Media) communication and the recipient's place in it

Despite the numerous publications devoted to communication and communicating, it seems that media researchers still readily use models that simplify the process of communication and, moreover, do not always correspond to the current media communication situation

It is therefore useful to recall the most important directions of communication studies and consider the choice of the most suitable direction. Communication studies follow two main schools[3]: The school of the communication process and the semiotic school. The former one perceives communication as the transmission of information and puts emphasis on the intentional activity of the sender which affects the recipient's state of mind and behaviour. This approach is typical of social sciences, but it is also employed by media studies. The later perceives communication as the production and exchange of meanings, the focus is placed on the message and on how it is read, and consequently also on the role of the recipient. Semioticians (including linguists) draw attention to the interaction between the reader and the text and to the fact that one message may (irrespective of the sender's intentions) have different meanings for different recipients. It seems that this approach, which has so far only been exploited to a slight degree in media studies, might bring interesting results, especially if we try to adapt it to the issue of reception.

Let us, however, return to communication itself. In the face of the multitude of definitions, I will not attempt to further specify the notion, especially that - as noted by John

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[3] J. Fiske, *Wprowadzenie do badań nad komunikowaniem* [Introduction to communication studies], Wrocław 2008, pp. 16–17.
When speaking of media communication, usually three trends are identified: structural-functional, cultural-semiotic and community trend, see, e.g. D. Kubicka, A. Kołodziejczyk *Psychologia wpływu mediów. Wybrane teorie, metody, badania* [Psychology of media influence. Selected theories, methods and studies], Kraków 2007, pp. 12–25. The first two trends can be linked with the process school of communication, the third one is related to semiotic school.

Fiske - "[c]ommunication is one of those human activities that everybody recognises but few can define satisfactorily"[4]. I will confine myself to listing the components of this process and determining the relationships between them.

The process of communication is composed of three ingredients: sender (senders), recipient (recipients) and message (transmitted information, text - its form and content), as well as an indispensable frame for this triad - the (broadly understood) context. The three components are also present in media communication, although with certain special characteristics. A media sender is a blurred category which covers not only the more or less direct (co-)authors of the message, but also the gatekeepers who influence the choice and selection of messages as well as their form. A media message differs from the non-media one in terms of its content (the content is more or less public in nature) and form (imposed by the medium). The status of a media recipient remains, however, undecided. As has been observed by Tomasz Piekot, "the status of the recipient of media messages is [...] complicated because it is hard to decide whether the recipient is an individual (a private person), or a strongly interconnected, homogeneous group (an audience). It seems that the collective status of the recipient is a gross oversimplification, due to the considerable diversity and dispersion of the audience"[5]. Moreover, new media technologies enable not only the personal selection of the content (from the abundant information available, the recipient chooses whatever they are interested in), but also the choice of time, place, situation and manner of receiving the message[6], which results in individualisation of reception.

The basic triad: sender - message - recipient involves various relationships. Except for interpersonal, *face-to-face* communication, there exist no direct relationships between the sender and the recipient (and even then they are not the most important relationships). The message becomes an intermediary element, and direct relationships only take place between the sender and the message, and between the message and the recipient. When analysing media communication, one more component needs to be taken into consideration, i.e. the intermediary medium (here understood narrowly as mass media[7]). The medium enters into

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[4] J. Fiske, *Wprowadzenie do badań nad komunikowaniem* [Introduction to communication studies], op. cit., p. 15.

[5] T. Piekot, *Dyskurs polskich wiadomości prasowych* [The discourse of Polish press releases], Kraków 2006, pp. 103–104.

[6] M. Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Media powszednie. Środki komunikowania masowego i szerokie paradygmaty medialne w życiu codziennym Polaków u progu XXI wieku* [Daily media. The means of mass communication and broad media paradigms in the daily lives of Polish people on the eve of the 21st century], Kraków 2008, p. 15.

[7] I use this term due to its convenience, since it allows me to specify the meaning of the polysemantic notion "media", although when referring to contemporary media communication, the category of mass scale should be understood in a rather limited sense. Although the Internet is a medium that reaches a wide audience, both the

relationships with both the message and the recipient, it becomes part of the communication process as the media context[8].

Thus, looking at media communication from the point of view of the recipient, two groups of relationships should be considered: relationships between the recipient and the message and the relationships between the recipient and the medium (or, rather, the medium and the recipient).

The message and the recipient - different ways of understanding the relationship

Let us begin with the relationships between the message and the recipient. A brief look at various theoretical concepts shows that the relationships can be understood in (at least) three ways.

The older concepts, which are based on the transmission model of information (Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver's cybernetic model[9]), assume that a message has its inherent meaning which the recipient merely has to read (decode). The group includes, among others, the structuralist model proposed by Roman Jakobson[10]. According to that researcher, the sender directs a message to the addressee, and the effectiveness of communication (i.e. the correct decoding of the message) depends on the existence of a contact between the participants, a code which is at least partially shared by the sender and recipient, and the ability to apply the message to a context that is common to the sender and recipient, the context being the reference to reality. In this model, the meaning is in a way "wrapped up" in the message - it is absolute and static. At the same time, it is the meaning created by the recipient - the only participant of communication that is really active. The recipient's meaning, if read correctly, should coincide with that which has been encoded in the message by the sender.

Interestingly, such an understanding of the relationship between the sender, recipient and message may also be found in popular thinking, which is evidenced by linguistic data, not only from the Polish language. Communication is commonly conceptualised as conveying or sending messages treated as objects. The sender sends a parcel with a content, that is the meaning, and the recipient receives and unpacks it (it is worth noting that even the terms

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manner of reception (time, place, device), and the type of received content are individualised. To a lesser degree this also applies to other media.

[8] See e.g. E. Szczęsna, *Poetyka mediów: polisemiotyczność, digitalizacja, reklama* [The poetics of media: polysemiotics, digitisation, advertising], Warszawa 2007, p. 16.

[9] C. Shannon, W. Weaver, *The mathematical theory of communication*, Urbana 1949.

[10] R. Jakobson, *Poetyka w świetle językoznawstwa* [Linguistics and poetics] [in:] idem, *W poszukiwaniu istoty języka* [Quest for the essence of language], vol. 2., Warszawa 1989, pp. 77–124.

sender and *recipient* are derived from postal practice). We are dealing here with a metaphorical model which Michael J. Reddy termed "the conduit metaphor"[11].

This traditional model, which is widely spread because it is based on popular, commmonsensical perceptions, was completely challenged by the theory known as constructivism. The theory treats a message as a purely material entity (some sounds, some iconic components), whereas a text (i.e. the meaningful whole) does not exist outside interpretation - it is only created as a result of the recipient's interpretive activities. This conviction is most fully reflected in the theory developed by Stanley Fish[12], an American literary historian and theorist. He believes that there is no such thing as an internal meaning that is immanent to a message (text). A text is a construct which is created as a result of interpretation. Moreover, the interpretation is not totally subjective, but rather depends on the interpretive community to which the recipient belongs. It was the notion of interpretive community that enabled Fish to break with the objective-subjective opposition. He wrote: "(...) if the self is conceived of not as an independent entity, but as a social construct whose operations are delimited by the systems of intelligibility that inform it, than the meanings it confers on texts are not its own but have their source in the interpretive community (communities) of which it is a function. Moreover, these meanings will be neither subjective nor objective [...]: they will not be objective because they will always have been the product of a point of view rather than being simply 'read off', and they will not be subjective because that point of view will always be social or institutional"[13]. According to this model, the sender virtually disappears from view, and the most important role is given to the recipient who constructs the text in the process of interpretation. "Interpretation is not the art of construing, but the art of constructing"[14], says Fish.

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[11] M.J. Reddy, *The conduit metaphor: A case of frame conflict in our language* [in:] *Metaphor and thought,* ed. A. Ortony, Cambridge University Press, 1979, pp. 284–324; see also: J. Maćkiewicz, *Słowo o słowie. Potoczna wiedza o języku* [A word about word. Popular knowledge about the language], Gdańsk 1999, pp. 61–68.
The basic diagram of that model looks as follows:
1. Thoughts and feelings are objects. The sender takes thoughts from his head or/and feelings from his heart. Examples of expressions: *one's head is filled with thoughts, get ideas out of one's head.*
2. The sender places those thoughts and feelings in words-containers. Examples: *put one's thoughts into words, fill words with new meanings.*
3. The sender's thoughts are transmitted to the recipient by means of word-containers sent through a suitable conduit (channel). Examples: *words carry thoughts and feelings, words are loaded with thoughts.*
4. The recipient takes the content (thoughts and feelings) out of the word-container. Examples: *to extract the meaning, to get a meaning out of a sentence* (ibidem, p. 64).
[12] S. Fish, *Interpretacja, retoryka, polityka. Eseje wybrane* [Interpretation, rhetoric, politics. Selected essays] Kraków 2002; see also A. Szahaj, *O interpretacji* [On interpretation], Kraków 2014.
[13] S. Fish, *Interpretacja, retoryka…,* op. cit., p. 96.
[14] Ibidem, p. 86.

Between those two extreme approaches, there is a third one according to which a message contains certain clues, stimuli which guide (although not determine) the manner of reception, and the meaning reconstructed by the recipient to a lesser or greater extent coincides with the meaning constructed by the sender (there is the sender's text and the recipient's text which can be equivalent although not identical). The theory assumes that the meaning is neither immanent to the message, nor is it an exclusive construct created by the recipient, but rather is produced as a result of the interaction between the message (the stimuli contained in it) and the recipient. This way of understanding of the relationship between the message and the recipient is probably the most popular theoretical and methodological solution employed nowadays. In order to explain and illustrate the concept, I will present one of the models which is based on that idea, i.e. the inferential model. It was developed by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (it is usually referred to as "the theory of relevance")[15] and brought to the Polish readers by the creators of communicative grammar - Aleksy Awdiejew and Grażyna Habrajska[16]. According to this model, in the first stage of the communication process, the recipient recognises the material form of the message. Next, from among the multitude of stimuli, he chooses those which he - for some reasons - considers to be relevant, i.e. suitable for interpretation of the entire message. Stimuli are the starting point for inference (drawing conclusions) - a process whose direction depends both on the communicative competence of the recipient and on the context. The main assumption of this theory is as follows: "(...) a text does not 'convey' the meaning of a message but rather indicates the possible directions of interpretation[17]". According to this concept the sender and the recipient are equal participants of the communication process, and the success of communication depends both on the communicative and cultural competence of the sender, and on the communicative and cultural competence of the recipient. An active recipient does not decode a text, but reads it in his own way. The reading is a complex process of uncovering the meanings, negotiating them in the interaction between the text and the recipient (and also the context, as will be shown later). It seems that this concept could be successfully used for analysing the reception of media messages.

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[15] D. Sperber, D. Wilson, *Relevance. Communication and cognition,* Oxford 1986.

[16] See e.g. A. Awdiejew, G. Habrajska, *Komponowanie sensu w procesie odbioru komunikatu* [Composing the meaning in the process of message reception], Łódź 2010.

[17] Ibidem, p. 9.

The process of message reception: from stimuli to response

Let us note that the researchers mentioned above (and not only them) do not view reception as an act, but rather as a process which consists of several stages. It starts with perception, i.e. recognition and choice of stimuli which should then be understood, or given a meaning and ordered in such a way as to constitute a coherent whole for the recipient [18]. This is facilitated by the interpretive frames[19] in our minds which - once activated by the textual stimuli - are able to structure the incoming data. The concept of interpretive frames, understood as "the structures that organise our whole experience"[20], structures based both on individual experiences, beliefs, convictions, and on the social and cultural knowledge of a group, is an extremely important concept for researching the text reception process. "During text reception, the appropriate linguistic structures activate [...] the related interpretive frames which begin to play the role of a 'guide' to the text. The frames allow the recipient to smoothly absorb and organise the incoming linear information, predict what will happen next, and ultimately create a new informational unit containing the global meaning of the text..."[21]. Interpretive frames operate both during the phase of text comprehension and the phase of its interpretation. A deepened interpretation is the next, although not obligatory, stage of the reception process. And finally the last stage - response to the message (which John Austin called the perlocutionary effect).

When dividing the reception process into stages, it is worthwhile recalling the hermeneutic concept proposed by Eric Donald Hirsch[22] who made a distinction between interpretation and understanding, and identified four stages of reception of each message: (re)cognition, understanding, interpretation and response. He claimed that understanding, that is the constructing of the meaning of a text (or rather, in his opinion, an attempt to reconstruct

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[18] In multimodal messages, for example TV messages, the reception process is even more complex, since one has to take into account the (simultaneous) identification of different types of signs and determining the complex relationships between various modalities. See e.g. D. Kubicka, *Nadawanie i odbiór przekazów audiowizualnych* [Sending and receiving audiovisual messages] [in:] D. Kubicka, A. Kołodziejczyk, *Psychologia wpływu mediów…*,op. cit., pp. 87–114.

[19] The concept of semantic frames was created by Charles Fillmore; see Ch. J. Fillmore, *Frame semantics*, [in:] *Linguistics in the morning calm*: *Selected Papers from SICOL-1981*, Seoul 1982; Ch.J. Fillmore, *Frames and the semantics of understanding*, "Quaderni di semantica", 1985, 6(2).

[20] M. Zawisławska, "Rama interpretacyjna jako narzędzie analizy tekstu" [Interpretive frame as a tool of text analysis] [in:] *Tekst. Analizy i interpretacje* [Text. Analysis and interpretation], eds. J. Bartmiński, B. Boniecka, Lublin 1998, p. 36.

[21] Ibidem

[22] E.D. Hirsch, *Rozumienie, interpretacja i krytyka* [Understanding, interpretation and criticism] [in:] *Znak, styl, konwencja* [Sign, style, convention], selection of texts and introduction by M. Głowiński, Warszawa 1977, pp. 197–241.

the sender's meaning), preceded interpretation, i.e. the explanation of the meaning[23]. In addition, not every reception of a text has to be connected with its interpretation, in many cases (in the majority of cases?), it is just enough to understand the text.

As was already noted by Hirsch, not all stages of reception have to be present in a given reception process, it is possible to leap from the recognition of stimuli to response. It might be interesting to compare those ideas with the findings made by media researchers who monitor the changes taking place in the area of media communication. Maryla Hopfinger[24] and Małgorzata Lisowska-Magdziarz write about "mosaic" perception which occurs when the "recipient primarily selects from a message that which is already known and corresponds to a simplified image of the world"[25] "Mosaic" perception is connected with the practices of zapping and non-linear reception which is common in media reception. Both those reception practices, which from television (zapping, i.e. originally TV channel hopping) and the Internet (non-linear reception connected with the reading of hypertext) extended to other media, require that the selection and organisation of stimuli take place within a much shorter time, which means that the stimuli have to be both more distinctive and make stronger reference to knowledge, expectations and experiences. They also have to quickly and automatically activate the appropriate (desired) interpretive frames[26].

Moreover, the message-recipient relationship does not have to be a one-way relationship. The recipient not only reads the message, but can "do something with it" (this is especially the case with new media): forward it, transform it, include in a new semantic whole, or make it an element of a communicative game.

The problem of reception is further complicated by the fact that a large proportion of all messages are multimodal messages. As researchers have observed: "(...) the understanding of a multimodal message consists of various partial, provisional understandings, reinterpretations and new interpretations which jointly constitute the process of interpretation"[27] It seems therefore logical to speak of a dynamic reception process where separate stages cannot be clearly identified, and, what is more, of a dynamic process of

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[23] Ibidem, p. 207. By comparison, Walery Pisarek identifies five stages: perception, understanding, interpretation, memorisation, and application; see W. Pisarek, *Wstęp do nauki o komunikowaniu* [Introduction to communication studies], Warszawa 2008, p. 35.

[24] M. Hopfinger, *Doświadczenia audiowizualne. O mediach w kulturze współczesnej* [Audiovisual experience. On media in contemporary culture], Warszawa 2003, pp. 59–61.

[25] M. Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Media powszednie…,* op. cit., p. 19.

[26] For more on the role of interpretive frames in media communication see e.g. R.J. Harris, *A cognitive psychology of mass communication,* 5th edition, New York–London 2009, pp. 40 ff.

[27] H.J. Bucher, *Rozumienie multimodalne lub recepcja jako interakcja* [Multimodal understanding or reception as interaction] [in:] *Lingwistyka mediów. Antologia tłumaczeń* [Media linguistics. An anthology of translations], eds. R. Opiłowski, J. Jarosz, P. Staniewski, Wrocław–Dresden 2015, pp. 90–91.

interaction between the message and the recipient[28]. As was pointed out by Bogusław Skowronek, "the interpretation of media texts [...] is [...] an active and consciously built process which involves the negotiations of meaning between a particular message (textual clues, rather than the hypothetical intention of the media sender) and the recipient, and more precisely: his knowledge of the world, culture and other works, formatted into cognitive schemata and fixed in experiential gestalts..."[29].

The recipient and effectiveness of the message

Assuming that the recipient actively participates in the communication process (even when the participation is not based on actual interactivity), one also has to assume that the effectiveness (felicity or fortunateness) of communication[30] to an equal degree depends on both participants of the communicative situation. All the sender can do is to construct the message in such a way as to allow the recipient to choose and recognise as relevant certain stimuli over others, and organise them in a certain manner (in other words, the sender can try to steer the order of perception and plan the choice of interpretive patterns). To attain this, the sender should imagine, or design the recipient.

What features need to be taken into account in order to trigger the desired response to the message? On the one hand, those would be individual features and, on the other hand, the features resulting from the reader's/ listener's/ viewer's membership in a given discourse community[31], or interpretive community[32].

As regards individual features, one would probably have to - although this might be difficult - take into consideration the psychological characteristics of the recipient, his beliefs and previous life and communicative experience. Also the recipient's competences are important here, namely the linguistic competence (i.e. knowledge of the code/codes which is/are used in the message), communicative competence (i.e. the ability to exploit situational circumstances when interpreting the text and the ability to read textual intentions), cultural and social competence.

The last of those competences is the most tightly related to the existence of interpretive communities (discourse communities). Fish defines an interpretive community as

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[28] Ibidem, pp. 94-96.
[29] B. Skowronek, *Mediolingwistyka. Wprowadzenie* [Media linguistics. An introduction], Kraków 2013, p. 74.
[30] I am referring here to the classic concept of speech acts proposed by John L. Austin.
[31] A term suggested by J. Swales; as cited in: A. Duszak, *Tekst, dyskurs, komunikacja międzykulturowa* [Text, discourse, intercultural communication], Warszawa 1998, pp. 253–255.
[32] A term coined by S. Fish, *Interpretacja, retoryka…,* op. cit.

a social or institutional point of view[33] resulting from being embedded in the same (sub)culture and from the similarity of experiences, opinions, hierarchies of values and visions of the world.

The place and role of the recipient in a communicative event is even more important in media communication which is recipient-oriented (the imagined audience seems to be not only the destination, but also the starting point of the communication process) and dominated by phatic function (establishing and maintaining contact with the recipient, which is reflected in the simplified sender macrointention: "I want you to read (listen, watch) me"[34]).

In addition to the features and competences listed above, the characteristics of a media recipient (an audience) cannot be complete without taking into account media-related competences[35]. They comprise not only the level of familiarity with media technologies (especially with new media), but also the awareness of genres (messages are to a large extent read through the prism of genres[36]) and the ability to decipher the complex dependencies between the real world and the media picture of the world.

However, even a relatively correct identification, or designing of the recipient (addressee, target group) does not guarantee the success of communication.

Message reception and the context

The reception of a message is to a large degree influenced by the context in which that message is embedded. One could say that the process of reception is the interaction between the message, the recipient and the context (contexts)[37]. The context affects the recipient's construction of the meaning of a message. It is assumed that "no understanding of a speech act is possible without the act of contextualisation, i.e. reconstruction of the context in which

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[33] Ibidem, p. 96.

[34] P. Nowak, R. Tokarski, *Medialna wizja świata a kreatywność językowa* [Media vision of the world and linguistic creativity] [in:] *Kreowanie świata w języku mediów* [Creating an image of the world in media language], eds. P. Nowak, R. Tokarski, Lublin 2007, p. 14. Referring to this phenomenon, Walery Pisarek wrote about "the rhetoric of the phatic bond" which "in a situation of tough competition between senders, necessitates a special manner of writing and speaking about the things that are interesting to the largest audience possible"; see W. Pisarek, *Język w mediach, media w języku* [Language in the media, media in the language] [in:] *Język w mediach masowych* [Language in mass media], eds. J. Bralczyk, K. Mosiołek-Kłosińska, Warszawa 2000, p. 11.

[35] See B. Skowronek, *Mediolingwistyka…,* op. cit., pp. 75–76.

[36] Małgorzata Lisowska-Magdziarz treats a media genre as a code for both media senders and recipients who have "specific systems of principles, expectations and assumptions", see M. Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Media powszednie…,* op.cit., p. 135.

[37] See B. Skowronek, *Mediolingwistyka…,* op. cit., p. 75.

a given utterance makes sense"[38]. According to the communicative grammar theory mentioned above, "a context is a systemic source of supplementary information"[39]. Contextual information also affects the final result of the reception process, irrespective of whether the final result is understood as an interpretation of the message or a response to the message, or both.

When conducting research on communication (including media communication), the notion of context should be understood very broadly - as the entire environment of the text-message *(con-text)*.

The first type of context that should be considered is the sign or semiotic context (or *co-text*), which means the immediate sign environment of a given message. This includes both the signs belonging to the same semiotic system (for example the intratextual relationship between linguistic signs and their configurations), and the signs co-existing in multimodal messages, belonging to different semiotic systems (for example the relationship between linguistic and visual signs). How does the cotext affect the reception process? Firstly, it allows predicting the successive elements of the text[40] in the case of linear reception. Relying on the preceding text, the recipient anticipates[41], foresees what might happen. Secondly, the cotext facilitates (enables?) the sequential construction of the complete representation of a message. The recipient aligns the incoming information with the previous information, adjusts the meanings, tries to solve a semantic jigsaw puzzle. Thirdly, in multimodal messages, the signs of one semiotic system provide an interpretive cotext for the signs of another system. A multimodal message works in a way similar to an orchestral score where the particular instrumental parts harmonise with each other, producing a whole which is not merely and simply a sum of parts. According to Skowronek, "media content is not a simple sum of visual, sound and verbal narration, but rather an outcome of their mutual interpenetration and interaction - a transsemiotic process"[42].

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[38] W. Czechowski, *Kontekst sytuacyjny a prawidłowość interpretacji komunikatu* [The situational context and the correctness of message interpretation] [in:] *Sytuacja komunikacyjna i jej parametry* [The communicative situation and its parameters], ed. G. Sawicka, Bydgoszcz 2010, p. 167.

[39] Ibidem, p. 168.

[40] It is assumed that linear reception occurs only with a certain group of messages - written and, above all, spoken linguistic texts. As regards TV or Internet messages, the reception is either sequential, but requires the synchronisation of data belonging to different semiotic systems (television), or non-linear (the Internet).

[41] For more information on the phenomenon of anticipation see e.g. M. Grabska, *Antycypacja i potoczny odbiór tekstu. Rozważania teoretyczne* [Anticipation and the colloquial reception of text. Theoretical reflections], [in:] *"Mówimy jak mówimy...". Gdzie ukryta jest potoczność* ["We speak the way we speak..." Where is colloquiality hidden], eds. M. Grabska, Ż. Sładkiewicz, Gdańsk 2015, pp. 59–67.

[42] B. Skowronek, *Mediolingwistyka...*, op. cit., p. 96.

Apart from cotext, one cannot overlook the importance of the non-immediate textual context, i.e. various relations between a given text and other texts. This is because the recipient reads a new text to a large extent through the prism of previously read texts and what is more, in the era of multimodality, it is not only intertextual relations that matter, but also intermodal ones (for example, the symbols included in press photographs may be a reference to a literary text).

Also the situational context, resulting from the message being embedded in a specific communicative situation, plays a considerable role in the understanding of a given message. The understanding of a message is affected by both the situational background (place, time, circumstances) and the participants (their number, communicative and social roles, intentions, goals, individual characteristics)[43]. Obviously, when communication is mediated through the media, both the situational background and the participants are different from those found in interpersonal communication (as I have already mentioned in the section "[media] communication and the recipient's place in it"). Moreover, in the era of dynamic development of media, the number of possible communicative situations has significantly increased, partly due to the appearance of constantly new media.

A special variety of a situational context in media communication is the medium-related context, i.e. "the characteristic features of a given media technology which affect the functioning and form of [...] the text"[44]. As Skowronek points out: "each medium represents a different technology along with its instructions (reception models), rules of operating and model methods of constructing meanings"[45]. Therefore, when speaking of the medium-related context, one has to take into consideration not only the technological aspect ("a different technology), but also the communicative aspect ("reception models", "rules of operation") and the formal and semiotic aspect ("model methods of constructing meanings", including media genres and formats). When writing about media as text determinants, Ewa Szczęsna notes that this "also means defining specific relations between the sender and the recipient"[46].

The types of context discussed above could be represented visually in the form of concentric circles, starting with the narrowest (sign context) to the widest ones (situational context), surrounding the centre in which the relations between the message and the recipient are taking place. There is, however, one more circle, a much wider sphere, namely the cultural

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[43] See T.A. van Dijk, *Badania nad dyskursem* [The study of discourse] [in:] *Dyskurs jako struktura i proces* [Discourse as structure and process], collective work edited by T.A. van Dijk, Warszawa 2001, p. 29. Van Dijk describes this type of context as local.

[44] B. Skowronek, *Mediolingwistyka…,* op. cit., p. 111.

[45] Ibidem, p. 59.

[46] E. Szczęsna, *Poetyka mediów…,* op. cit., p. 16.

(or cultural-cognitive) context, i.e. the world of concepts, values, symbols, stereotypes, customs and behaviour patterns specific to a particular culture and a particular stage of cultural development. In other words, this includes encyclopaedic knowledge (although not necessarily and not exclusively scientific knowledge), as well as the world picture encoded in various semiotic systems (mainly in the language) and internalised cultural patterns and rules. Each user of culture who assumes the role of a recipient is already "interpretatively situated"[47], the culture provides him with tools and interpretive models. As Fish observes: "a culture fills brains [...], it fills them so that no one's interpretive acts are exclusively his own..."[48]. A cultural context is the result of membership in a particular interpretive community (and, at the same time, determines membership in that community).

The semiotic, textual, situational (including media) and cultural context jointly create the contextual environment of a message which affects the relationship between the message and the recipient.

When analysing the contextual conditions in the media, attention should be given to the greater or smaller impact those conditions may have on message reception. To this end, the distinction between high-context and low-context[49] communication can be used (concepts suggested by Edward T. Hall). This dimension defines the role of context in the reception of a message. In low-context communication, the majority of interpretive clues are contained in the message itself, whereas in high-context communication the text is deficient in interpretive stimuli, and the recipient searches for clues "on the outside", mainly among situational components. (Public) communication mediated through mass media is high-context communication where not only situational references are very important, but also media references which affect the former to a great extent.

Conclusion

What research suggestions could follow from adopting the above-described model of reception and its determinants? Firstly, the need to take greater account of the recipient's participation in the communication process, including not only his needs and expectations (like in the uses and gratifications theory), but also his world-view, knowledge (both scientific and commonsense ewentualnie current), and various competences. Secondly, the need to take

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[47] A term used by S. Fish, *Interpretacja, retoryka…,* op. cit., p. 381.
[48] Ibidem, p. 95.
[49] E.T. Hall, *Poza kulturą* [Beyond culture], Warszawa 2001.

greater account of the (broadly understood) context, including media context. Thirdly, research studies should take into account the multimodality of message - how the relations between various semiotic system affect the reception process (how they complicate the process), and how those systems mutually contextualise each other.