

Manifestations of Natural Written Speech: Inscriptions on Photos¹

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Abstract. The main purpose of this article is to consider certain genres of natural writing. The very concept of “natural written speech” at the present time has not received a complete and comprehensive interpretation. However, there are fewer examples of it today. In part, the disappearance of the genres of natural writing is associated with the onset of the digital era, when people stopped writing physical letters and notes, ceased making notes for themselves, and no longer annotated and signed photographs. Many genres of writing are capable of giving an idea of the writer in the same way as the varieties of oral speech. In natural written speech, some features of personality and linguistic personality are manifested. The aim of the research, presented in the article, is to analyse inscriptions on photographs from the viewpoint of their lexis, punctuation, and graphical layout to define the chronotope and personal characteristics of the authors of this genre of written discourse. The focus is on the linguistic means of inscriptions on photos, i.e., the graphic, lexical, derivational and other features. In the process of analysing the inscriptions, the main varieties of this genre were identified: inscriptions made as a memento; inscriptions that represent the definition of an event or time and place; inscriptions made to convey information to close relatives, etc. In addition, the inscriptions on photographs can be classified by keywords, if possible, determining the chronotope, by the use of graphic means, by the location of the inscription itself in the photograph. To a certain extent, the inscriptions made on photographs reflect the personality traits of a person. The analysis shows that inscriptions on photographs were a forerunner of sorts of personal pages on Instagram.

Keywords: natural writing, written speech, genre, inscriptions, photographs, personality of the writer, linguistic personality, graphic means, chronotope

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Much has already been said about complicated interactions between oral and written speech. Do oral or written speech genres dominate communication in certain professions? Is written speech important in everyday life? To what degree are personal and professional qualities connected? Does this connection manifest itself in natural written speech? These questions continue to intrigue linguists, psychologists, and philosophers alike.

The problem of conveying personality traits through written speech is particularly relevant today, since communication is migrating fully online, combining features of both colloquial and written speech. Following such linguists as M.A. Krongauz² (Krongauz 2016) and E.V. Kakorina (Kakorina 2007), we have repeatedly turned our attention to the questions of internet communication and identified its unique features (Krasovskaya 2020). When looking at internet communication, we also attempt to see the personality behind written messages and glean the manifestations of its peculiarities. However, written communication in its traditional “paper” form offers much that helps us to understand the person writing and reveal their personality traits. The digital era is another reason behind the virtually complete disappearance of many genres of natural written speech: letters sent via regular mail; notes and sketches jotted down by hand; inscriptions on printed photos, etc. Along with these written speech genres, a certain way of transmitting information about the person writing is disappearing, too.

Therefore, as internet communication expands, the manifestations of the psychological features of the writer, the spread of the written form as such, and the virtual loss of many genres of natural written speech, in particular, inscriptions on photos, disappear. This is what constitutes the uniqueness of the present study.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse inscriptions on photos, with a particular focus on their lexis, punctuation and graphic appearance in order to determine their chronotope and the personality traits of their authors. The linguistic features (graphic and lexical features, word-formation peculiarities, etc.) of inscriptions on photos are the object of our study.

We use inscriptions on the reverse of photos taken by different people at different times as our study material.

The novelty of the present study lies in the fact that we have chosen study material that has never been investigated before: there have been virtually no studies of inscriptions on photos, while we believe them to manifest people’s natural written speech and to express, in most cases, a person’s attitude to reality and people, to indicate the place and time of an event.

Our hypothesis is that inscriptions on photos, as a manifestation of a person’s natural written speech, may indicate its chronotope and contain information on the personality of the author.

² Krongauz M.A. 2016. In Fact, There is no Single Internet Language. *Kommersant Style* [Online source]. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3177776> (accessed March 1, 2021).

We use various research methods to achieve our purpose: lexical analysis to identify several lexical units; semantic analysis to consider the semantic features of some lexical units; and a comprehensive analysis of graphic and visual means, which allows us to consider graphic and visual units as an integral whole.

Theoretical overview

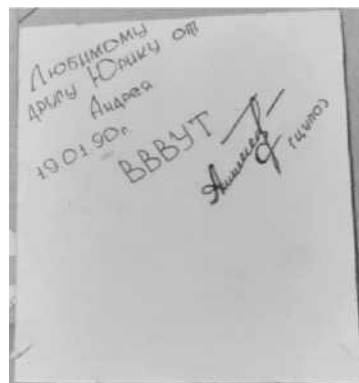
Interest in written speech products that, along with oral speech, reflect a person's unique character traits, is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Soviet psychologists (A.R. Luria and many others (see Luria 1979)) were the first to investigate this type of speech as a structurally and functionally complex mental process. The unique social experience of every individual is a crucial factor that affects their written speech, and it is therefore tremendously important for studying this speech. Writing as a type of activity, therefore, is based on such mental and physiological processes as memory, thinking, perception, attention, and speech.

Oral and written types of speech have unique features, which allows us to distinguish between a linguistic personality and a written linguistic personality in a single human being. These features include: the means of conveying messages (acoustic code / graphic code); immediate contact between communicating persons (presence / absence); types of norms (orthoepic / orthographic); and the temporal characteristics of thinking processes and presenting information (simultaneous / consecutive). Jan Baudouin de Courtenay (Baudouin de Courtenay 1912: 14), T.M. Nikolaeva (Nikolaeva 1961: 78), Josef Vachek (Vachek 1967: 524), and other scholars pointed out specific ways of considering oral and written speech.

“Natural written speech” means speech activity (and its product, i.e., texts) that has a written form, is spontaneous and non-professional. N.B. Lebedeva believes that natural written speech is linked to three speech areas: oral colloquial speech; artificial oral speech; and artificial written speech. It is important to note that linguists today are necessarily concerned with the concept of natural written speech in connection with studying internet communication – various types of mobile messages, correspondence on social networks, on forums, etc. may also be viewed as natural written speech. However, in our present study, we will classify those genres that emerged and traditionally existed at the time when mass use of the internet as a means of communication did not yet exist as natural written speech. In the present paper, we classify inscriptions on photos as natural written speech. Offering a theoretical description of the genre is rather difficult since it is not easy to identify its well-established forms. Linguists have repeatedly commented on the difficulties of defining many genres that fall under the natural written speech rubric. For instance, T.G. Rabenko discusses variations in interpreting and defining natural written speech genres stating, “Joining natural written speech to related types of speech activities produces speech genres on the borders of various speech areas [...] its core is formed by natural written texts proper that feature clear typological signs: they are unofficial, spontaneous, and non-professional (per-

sonal letters, personal notes, graffiti, and marginalia in copy books and books). The periphery includes transitional texts bordering on ‘artificial’ written speech: fiction (folk memoirs, diaries, etc.), official (autobiography, explanatory report), newspaper texts (letters to the editor, letters to authorities)”³. Subsequently, she states that the very understanding of natural written speech is somewhat provisional, “Ultimately, the ‘natural’ part (as applied to written speech, its products and processes) is a somewhat provisional term that strives to cover fairly variegated contents distinguished not so much on the formal logical grounds as intuitively (at this stage of interpreting the natural Russian written speech phenomenon)”⁴.

Rabenko uses the communicative semantic model developed by N.B. Lebedeva, who asserts that natural written speech has the following attributes: “Substantive facients: 1) author (who?); 2) addressee (to whom?); sign – dictum and mode contents (what?); 4) instrument and means (with what?); 5) base – material medium used to transmit the sign (on what?); and 6) the sign’s location – the base carrier (in what? on what?). Non-substantive facients: 1) purpose – the communicative purpose facient (what for?); 2) the sign’s graphic and spatial parameter (how?); 3) communication environment (where?), which includes potential co-authors, readers (recipients), mediated transmitters and possible ‘destroyers’ of a written speech work; 4) communication time – the temporal interval between creation of a written sign and its perception (when?); 5) the course of communication; 6) social evaluation.” (Lebedeva 2001: 4–10). We claim that many of these factors (facients) play a significant role in the consideration of such a genre of natural written speech as inscriptions on photos.



Findings and discussion

Let us consider some examples of inscriptions on photos, paying special attention to certain lexical features, special graphic markings, certain visual specifics, and indications of time and place.

1) The word “dear” used at the beginning is emotionally and expressively tinged and conveys the writer’s warm, friendly attitude to the addressee; it immediately attracts attention. Friendliness is evident from the use of the Russian diminutive suffix -ik in the anthroponym. The inscription has markers of various kinds: the date and the name of an educational institution (Volsk Higher Military Logistics College) immerse

³ Rabenko T.G. 2018. *Genres of Natural Written Russian Speech in the Variantological Aspect*. PhD Diss., Kemerovo. P. 17.

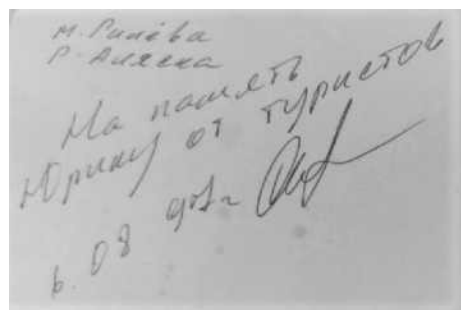
⁴ Ibid.

the addressee in a particular chronotope that indicates events of 30 years ago – studying at the college and the life of cadets. The main inscription ends with the word “Tsupa,” the author’s nickname. Another interesting detail: the nickname itself is part of the colloquial style, but its placement and the brackets around it indicate some tendencies to preserve an element of an official business style. On the one hand, it may evidence the author’s familiarity with official paperwork; on the other, it may be a sign of self-directed irony. A few words about the handwriting: we can clearly see good calligraphy skills; the letters look like graphic signs usually used on blueprints. Our final remark concerns the person’s signature: it is traced over, written clearly and carefully, which also reveals certain aspects of the author’s personality, mostly likely, his self-confidence and self-assurance.

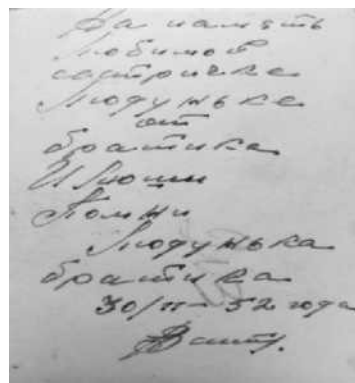
2) Comparing this inscription with inscription No. 1 (see above), we can say that, despite its author being a woman (and women are inclined to show their emotions), the inscription lacks emotional and expressive elements. We can suppose that friendship between the two women is not as strong as between the cadet friends (see above). However, the drawing is a sort of means of expressing emotions; in our opinion, it compensates somewhat for unspoken words. On the one hand, the drawing conveys the author’s mood. On the other, the feelings expressed are rather neutral – in contrast to the words, which are stark and specific. The drawing creates an overall positive impression linked to summer, the seaside, and romance. Curiously, the signature is an abbreviation of the first letters of the last name, name, and patronymic. It is somewhat mysterious and emotional, as is typical of young people.



3) The third fragment is a collective inscription addressed to a single person. Its emotional expressive means include a diminutive form of his name, “Yurik.” It means the authors treated the addressee warmly as one of the gang. Note the date and place, which allow us to pinpoint precisely when and where the photo was taken, which is certainly important for tourists. The prepositional form “from tourists” evidences a somewhat collective mindset. This form allows us to state with confidence that the people who signed the photo thought of themselves as an integral whole, even though the photo bears the signature of a single person. We can also note that no special visual means were used to highlight the signature, date, etc. Most likely, people who wrote the inscription did not care for elegance and beauty, they cared about friendship and the place, which is crucial for tourists.



4) This inscription demonstrates a large number of emotional expressive linguistic means such as diminutive forms of appellatives and the addressee's name expressed through the use of diminutive suffixes. The diminutive form of the name is of interest here; we believe it is either an occasional or a dialectal formation. In any case, it can be seen as a peculiar, "intimate," family-specific linguistic means that makes it possible to convey not only some neutral information, but also a caring, gentle, and familial attitude to the person. The last phrase signifies the importance of interpersonal relations for the writer, showing that they care for person they are writing to. The chronotope is marked by a date only.

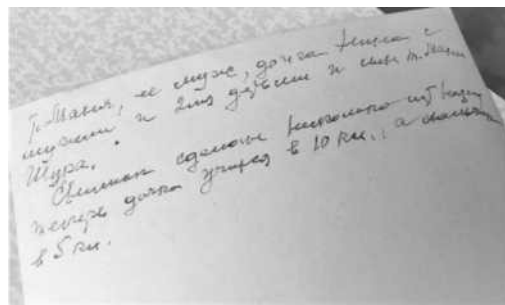


5) The next inscription takes us back to the chronotope of the Soviet Union. The text shows that the writer was serving in the Soviet military. The fact that the writer points this out in the inscription is a sign that he likely treats this part of his biography as something important and significant. Additionally, it is important that the writer uses kinship terms and personal names, which makes the inscription even more precise and indicates that it is meant for specific addressees. The date combines Arabic (date), Roman (month), and Arabic again (year) figures. The inscription is made even more specific by indicating a toponym, the city of Perm.

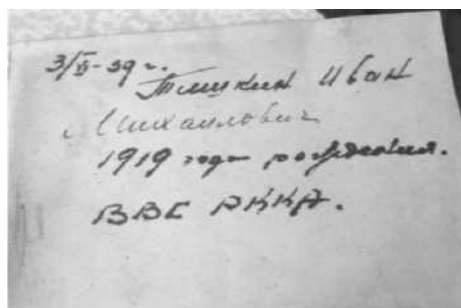
6) The inscription on Photo 6 is interesting. We do not see here any traditional words expressing the semantics of a specific memory, but the inscription clearly indicates the people in the photo: Aunt Manya, her husband [...]. We can suppose that this inscription was addressed to close relatives who know every family member by name.

However, the relatives most likely have not seen each other for a long time, because the second part of the inscription specifies information about the children's changing ages. The inscription has no signature.

The chronotope is represented in a relative way – by indicating the change of school age and the family relationships. Such inscriptions are similar to diary entries; their purpose is to convey information, not just to commit something to memory.



7) This inscription also is of the kind where lexical means do not convey memory semantics directly. The photo presents the personality of the person in a precise, business-like, biographical way: his last name, name, patronymic, date of birth, and, we can suppose, the dates of military service. What is particularly characteristic here is the notation Air Force of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, which indicates the occupation of the addressor and immerses us into the older chronotope of the Soviet military, which is also confirmed by the date. The precise information, coupled with the complete lack of emotions, indicate that the inscription was made by a military person who is strict, precise, and does not intend to exhibit feelings and emotions.



Conclusions

Our analysis of inscriptions on photos leads to several interesting observations.

1) Photo inscriptions can be broken down into several types by their communicative purpose and intent: to preserve a moment in memory; to convey official information; to convey emotions; to communicate, specify, and particularize personal information.

2) The inscriptions we analysed may convey information about the time and place a given event took place, as well about the activity depicted in the photo, the time period during which it was taken, how close the people in it are, and their emotional and volitional state.

3) The persons writing may express their emotions through semantics and suffixes, and also through the location of the inscription, through drawing, handwriting, etc.

We believe that out of the above-given list of important factors for determining the genre specifics of natural written speech, the following are important for assessing those of photo inscriptions: author; addressee; dictum-modus contents; substrate, or the material medium used to convey the sign; purpose; the graphic and spatial parameter of the sign; the communication environment; the communication time; and the social assessment of the message.

Undoubtedly, our work has interesting prospects for the consideration of punctuation, spelling, where the inscriptions are located on the photo itself, etc.

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Conflicts of interest.

The authors declare the absence of any conflicts of interests.

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