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THE LANGUAGE MEANS OF COMICALITY IN CLICKBAIT HEADINGS[1]

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Abstract. The analysis of material presented in the media discourse demonstrates significant changes in the intentionality of the journalistic text, which are reflected in establishing contacts so as to grab and retain the reader's attention. This feature of modern media text is represented in changing genre preferences, speech tactics and strategies, and, consequently, selecting and combining linguistic means. One of the manifestations of this trend is the phenomenon of clickbait, which is a communicative act of promising to continue communication. This article is dedicated to the clickbait with the semantics of comicality. The collected from the Russian-language Internet research material includes clickbait headings that promise a certain funny content. The study revealed that a clickbait model includes the following semantic components: a stimulating utterance of the subject of speech seeking to involve the reader in the humorous nature of hypertext; the verbal and non-verbal markers of the object of laughter; markers, which reflect Internet user's involvement in the communicative act. The analysis of relationship between the components of a clickbait model resulted in specifying four types of clickbait headlines: 1) narrative headlines, which invite the reader to laugh what some other readers have already laughed at; 2) offering headlines suggesting some comic entertainment; 3) allusive clickbaits that hint on the possibility to continue amusing reading; 4) nominative clickbaits, which name the expected laughing reaction to the presentation of some objects.

Key words: clickbait, comicality, media text, semantics, speech act.

ЯЗЫКОВЫЕ СРЕДСТВА КОМИЧЕСКОГО В КЛИКБЕЙТЕ[1]

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Аннотация. Анализ современного речевого материала, представленного в медиапространстве, демонстрирует значительные изменения интенциональности журналистского текста. На первый план выходит интенция контактоустановления – захвата внимания читателя и стремление его не упустить. Эта особенность современного медиатекста реализуется в изменении жанровых предпочтений, особенностей

речевых тактик и стратегий, а следовательно, отбора и сочетания языковых средств. Одним из проявлений указанной тенденции становится распространение кликбейта – коммуникативного акта обещания продолжить коммуникацию. Статья посвящена кликбейтам с семантикой комического. Материалом исследования послужили кликбейты в русскоязычной сети, содержащие обещание смешного. Выявлено, что модель кликбейта включает следующие смысловые компоненты: стимулирующая реплика субъекта речи, стремящегося вовлечь в смеховую стихию гипертекста; речевые и невербальные маркеры объекта смеха; маркеры, отражающие учет присутствия пользователя в коммуникации. В ходе анализа отношений между компонентами модели кликбейта выделены четыре типа: 1) заголовки-нарративы, включающие приглашение читателю посмеяться над тем, над чем уже посмеялись ранее; 2) заголовки-оферты, содержащие предложение смешного; 3) кликбейты-аллюзии, выражающие намек на возможность продолжения забавного чтения; 4) кликбейты-номинативы, называющие ожидаемую смеховую реакцию на представление каких-то объектов.

Ключевые слова: кликбейт, комическое, медиатекст, семантика, речевой акт.

Introduction

The hypertext in the news is composed due to the use of multiple means of intertextual linkings, including catchy headlines as if they are some toutings made during the fairs. Such catchy headlines attract reader's attention by promising some cheerful and amusing time spent together and bringing a pleasant sense of belonging. Through referring to obscenities, such preview headlines provide for endless surfing in the web space. Such hypertext toutings make a victim of every user clicking on boldly announced promises, looking through some garbage websites that lack any valuable information (created, in the first place, to hide some advertising links leading to commercial websites) (comp.: [Daoud, El-Seoud, 2019]).

When browsing the Internet, Internet-users often look for attractive form rather than for interesting and informative content. That is the reason why the phenomenon of clickbait is nowadays associated with senseless headlines, so-called fake headings and captions used as "hooks". Clickbaiting appeared in social networks in the form of blog headlines [Potthast et al., 2016], and today it is often found in entertaining, analytical and news media discourse.

Clickbaits are considered a means of falsifying information [Al Asaad, Erascu, 2018; Chanysheva, 2016; Gavrikova, 2018c; Serrano, Romero-Rodríguez, Gómez, 2018; Shu et al., 2018; Vol'skaia, 2018]. We should note that daily routine is presented in a clickbait in such a light that makes it look worse than in reality [Molyneux, Coddington, 2019]. Therefore, the quality of news presenting is getting lower: more attention is paid to the presentation form rather than the content, clickbait's author intentionally gives an impression that readers are directly involved with the content of the message [Geckil et al., 2018; Gavrikova, 2018b; Agrawal, 2016], though, in reality, the article's content has nothing to do with the topic implied in the headline. Clickbaits are often placed on a par with spam messages (based on YouTube data) [Gavrikova, 2018a; Zannettou et al., 2018].

Last years have seen a lot of posts suggesting that we should get rid of clickbaiting. In this regard, scientists create various kinds of models to identify the headlines that mislead readers. The material that we provide shows that some comic tools are used in clickbaits to attract attention [Gajda, Brzozowska (eds.), 2000; Vasileva, 2017]. Today's Internet discourse ridicules everything: something comic is seen in miserable, sloppy, disgusting and even beautiful things. In clickbaits, the comic becomes a universally used "hook" to fully involve readers in viewing the content that the clickbaits creators want to make attractive.

The subject of any clickbait relies on user activity of readers, provoking their interest in the further reading of texts and some kind of a game, entertainment within a communication act by means of making readers laugh because of the information being "touted".

Entertainment is one of the main functions of the media text, therefore, the laughing reaction caused by reading and, as a result, the relief of social tension can be considered as one of the forms of communication in the media space sought after by the authors (see Fig. 1).

| *a* | *b* | *c* |

Fig. 1. A promise of laugh moments:

a – funny video showing an animal drama has won the hearts of Internet surfers;
b – beach activities with no retouch and photoshop applied: you'll be crying with laughter;
c – jokey photos making everybody laugh (20 photos)

Clickbait pragmatic implication is to promise communication with some content to further entertain and amuse. The purpose of this article is to describe the common structural patterns of clickbait headlines that use comic tools.

Based on V.V. Vinogradov's [Vinogradov, 1959] thought about the mutual determination of form and content, it can be assumed that the listed features of the functionality inherent to clickbaits are reflected in their verbal component: in special marker words, in the syntactic structure, in the semantic connotations. This characteristic of clickbait becomes the main objective of the research and entails a number of tasks.

The purpose of this article is to describe the constituency of common structural patterns of clickbait headlines that use comic verbal and nonverbal tools, which requires the search of those clickbaits that make use of comic tools to link the content of the texts they provide with the headlines, finding language markers of comicality (such as referring to precedent phenomena, using of aposiopesis, the reduction of a statement to absurdity, the inclusion of contradictory information, intentional informational emptiness, playing on the verge of a foul) installed into the headlines as well as to work out some classification of utterances and other markers of comicality promises in media content. All these techniques act to form the effect of heightened anticipation in the headline-text system.

The studies of clickbaits have started most recently. By various estimates, the word "clickbait" appeared at the end of the 90s of the previous century, or even at the 10s of this one [Ageeva, Smyshliaeva, 2019; Molyneux, Coddington, 2019]. Scientifical interest in this phenomenon is stipulated by the active spread of online communication, its characteristic phenomena [Brzozowska, 2013] as well as the reaction to such a spread expressed by online communication participants.

Headlines perceived as so-called "toutings" were named "clickbaits", and due to their getting widely spread all over the world, now they raise genuine interest of the scientists from all over the world [Al Asaad, Erascu, 2018; Anand, Chakraborty, Park, 2017; Fu et al., 2017; Gavrikova, 2018a; Serrano, Romero-Rodríguez, Gómez, 2018; Sladkevich, 2019; Vol'skaia, 2018; Wang, Wu, 2017]. Originally, clickbait is based on some creative headlines and is aimed at attracting public attention to the topical issue using both content and form (comp.: [Molyneux, Coddington, 2019]).

As a rule, study materials include texts posted in social networks [Agrawal, 2016; Anand, Chakraborty, Park, 2017; Khater et al., 2018; Potthast et al., 2016; Serrano, Romero-Rodríguez, Gómez, 2018; Wang, Wu, 2017; Zheng et al., 2017], far less they involve news websites [Geckil et al., 2018; Molyneux, Coddington, 2019]. Attempts have been made to classify clickbaits based on symbols [Ageeva, Smyshliaeva, 2019; Gavrikova, 2018a; Wongsap et al., 2018], wordings or content [Zheng et al., 2018]. A number of research are attempted to create a topic model [Al Asaad, Erascu, 2018; Potthast et al., 2016; Serrano, Romero-Rodríguez, Gómez, 2018],

neurolinguistic model [Agrawal, 2016; Anand, Chakraborty, Park, 2017; Fu et al., 2017], user behaviour model [Zheng et al., 2017], lexical model [Zheng et al., 2018], etc. This article suggests that we put clickbait in the context of dialogics to see the role of comic tools in hypertext formation [Bakhtin, 1996; Duskaeva, 2004].

Study methodology

In search of clickbait definition, the following characteristics have been defined, namely, headline function within the text and advertising function as a part of communication. The latter is realised through attracting attention due to the shocking character of the form and it is often not linked with the content of the headlined text [Ageeva, Smyshliaeva, 2019; Khater et al., 2018; Nikolaeva, 2017; Solov'ev, 2018; Vol'skaia, 2018].

We would like to direct attention to the dialogical essence of such a headline, taking into account a position taken by the headlines in the structure of hypertext formation. Proceeding from the three-part structure of media talk, developed by L.R. Duskaeva, consisting of paratext, metatext and intratext [Duskaeva (ed.), 2018], we ascribe clickbait to the phenomenon of paratext within hypertext, thus providing the latter with intertextual interconnection formed within the interaction with presupposed reader's reaction to a clickbait. Any promise, like "touting" during a fair or a buffoonery, urges users to communicate cheerfully and plainly in order to receive some kind of pleasure.

This article is aimed at analysing the represented clickbait content that promises convivial communication and specifying direct and indirect speech act means. This task is fulfilled by means of a) delivering a semantic and pragmatic classification of clickbaits; b) specifying, analysing and classifying the means of defining major components of clickbait intention by using verbal and non-verbal means within different media types.

The study materials cover promissive clickbaits implying some comic content posted in Russian-language networks. This choice is not an accidental one. Despite the fact that since 2016 [Ageeva, Smyshliaeva, 2019] the campaign to get rid of clickbaits has been run, this phenomenon is spread so wide that clickbaits can be found even in news media discourse, which is supposed to be forbidden, as the major value of news reporting is providing information. Nevertheless, to win the reader's attention, headlines appear to become more entertaining. We have collected 50 clickbaiting headlines at the news portal Lenta.ru in order to study the stated topic. To collect empirical database for the research, we have used a continuous sampling method. Lenta.ru is one of the largest Russian news portals covering events in the area of economy, politics, defence and law enforcement agencies, science and technology, culture, sports, etc. The portal covers both Russian and international news. In the latter case, we are talking about translated texts taken from different foreign sources referred to by the authors. Curiously enough, most often those clickbaits that have the semantics of comicality are provided by translated texts of some entertaining character.

The studies performed resort to the means of modelling, for deductive pragmalinguistic interpretation of clickbaiting headlines.

The deductive pragmalinguistic interpretation of clickbaiting headlines resulted in distinguishing several stages of constructing comic clickbaits: 1) inspiring remark of a clickbait actor implying a promise; 2) verbal and non-verbal markers of laughter; 3) markers of a presupposed funny reply to the stimulus. These are the most distinguishing symbols of a clickbaiting promise. Thus, the speech act implying a promise (clickbait) gets a new form in the context of mass media.

Thus, the clickbait promise of laugh is based on establishing a connection of any nature with the text announced in a clickbait. The degree of the explication of possible comic effect can be different as well as the degree of its connection with the text content and the means representing comicality. Proceeding from the links between the components of the comic clickbait model, several types of language-verbalized clickbaits can be specified: 1) narrative headlines proposing the reader to laugh at the things that were laughed at by other readers before; 2) offering headlines providing for the promise of comic content using laughter markers; 3) allusive clickbaits providing for a hint to continue an entertaining reading; 4) nominating clickbaits providing for expected reaction of laughter expressed because some objects are presented.

In accordance with the stated topic, the analysis pays special attention to the semantics of clickbaits and their lexical content, therefore

the proposed analysis also includes certain elements of content analysis and lexical analysis. From the standpoint of the authors of the article, this allows one to achieve the most complete, comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under consideration.

In addition, when describing the "heading – text" effects, as well as when explaining communicative objectives and tasks, one cannot do without a methodology developed in terms of intentional stylistics. This is the final stage of the analysis, which makes it possible to fully represent the phenomenon of clickbaiting in the broad outlines of the development trends characteristic of the modern media text.

Results and discussion

The results of contextual and pragmastylistic analysis are presented below together with the explication of every type. It will help prove the hypotheses about pragmatic relationship between the title and the text, demonstrate its proximity to fair touting, reveal the techniques of creating clickbait headings in media discourse.

The first type is composed of ***narrative clickbaits*** that contain a reminder of some comic situation or a story. It is suggested that its details are to be revealed in the course of further reading only:

(1) Несуразный смокинг Трампа на встрече с королевой **подняли на смех** (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/06/10/trumpstuxedo/) –
"Trump's absurd tuxedo was laughed at during the meeting with the queen" (hereinafter translated by us. – *N. P., I. A.*);
(2) Мать жениха **подняли на смех** за попытку перещеголять невесту (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/08/02/sameasbride/) –
"Bridegroom's mother was laughed at for attempting to outmatch the bride".

As we see it, such a clickbait contains indications of a speech act implying laughter (phraseological unit *осмеян* (laughed somebody out)); there is an object triggering laughter by means of it being not appropriate in a given situation *(absurd tuxedo, attempt to outmatch the bride)*. Finally, such a clickbait provides for a subject of laughter; it is indicated by indefinite-personal forms, as a rule *(laughed somebody out, somebody was ridiculed)*.

(3) Любимый дешевый бренд россиян выпустил женскую одежду для мужчин и был **осмеян** (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/06/04/menstop/) –
"Cheap brand admired by Russians started a female clothes line for men and was laughed out".

In the post titled the headline attracts attention due to the abundance of assessment lexical units. Absolute contact-establishing potential is conveyed by a positively assessing word *admired by*; and there appears some kind of discordance in the word combination *cheap* and *admired by* – so, emotional assessment together with pragmatic assessment provides for such a contact-establishing potential. Visual component, being means of attracting attention, apart from a headline, is a photo of a dark-skinned man with a shirtless torso. This way, an object to laugh at was introduced by Asos brand having released female clothes for men, and it triggered both laughter and indignation of their supporters (users). The text has several comments of Twitter network users, having left their critical opinion on brand's newcomers. They are in no way linked to the semantics of comicality, though the headline uses the potential of comic tools, namely, the combination of a verb in the past tense and a short form of past participle *осмеян* (was laughed out).

This type of headlines include the following ones:

(4) Невесту **высмеяли** за слишком маленькое помолвочное кольцо (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/05/14/smallring/) –
"Bride was teased because of a too small engagement ring";

similar structure is characteristic for the following headlines:

(5) Тучную невесту **высмеяли** за похожее на пижаму платье (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/06/04/dressshaming/) –
"Plus-size bride was ridiculed at the wedding for wearing a pyjamas-like dress";
(6) Невесту **высмеяли** за неподобающее нижнее белье и шляпу на свадьбе (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/07/23/brideshaming/) –
"The bride was laughed out because of inappropriate underwear and a hat at the wedding";
(7) Странные пятна на платье невесты **рассмешили** пользователей сети (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/08/01/coffeebreak/) –

"Strange spots on bride's clothes made Internet users laugh",

where the actor of a speech act in an indefinite-personal sentence involves the addressee to join some combined action using such verbs as *высмеяли* (ridiculed, laughed out), namely, to laugh at a non-ordinary situation with addressee's attention being focused on the absurdity of bride's clothes: underwear, hat and strange blots on the dress. Headline (4) has a bride as a speech object and an engagement ring as its subject in order to involve the addressees in the situation for them to laugh at. It uses the picture of the ring for the web users to laugh at its size, suggesting that scientists devise an instrument to examine the size of the ring. Thus, linguistic means used in the headline are predetermined by the adverb of measure *too much*, pointing at the deviation from the norm meaning "way over, beyond measure", and a qualitative adjective "small" characterizing a substantial deviation from average size values. An indirect indication of a subject to be laughed at is provided by using the verb *высмеяли* (laughed out).

Such type of headlines is often eliminating the line between the intimate (private) and the public.

(8) Студентку **подняли на смех** за отказ брить ноги из-за лени (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/04/03/depressed/) –

"Female student was made fun of because she refused to shave her legs claiming that she is lazy".

The headline cites the student from Valencia saying that she was "just too lazy" to shave legs, though her protesting position was to a great extent connected with her refusal to follow the rules being observed by the public. The text starts from the photo displaying an unshaved leg, and there is no object of a speech act in the picture. The phraseological unit *подняли на смех* (made fun of) together with a word combination *because of being lazy* triggers more negative reactions and implies disapproval of the public. The phraseological unit by itself relates to the conversational (informal) style. This fact is used as a means of contact establishing, getting closer to the author and the addressee. Thus, the heading attracts attention as it triggers misunderstanding and the barbed wit of the public: "A lot of people were labelling her awful and disgusting, the others were claiming that she had low self-esteem and she was suffering from depression".

Thus, the first type is composed of narrative headlines describing the situation that implied laughter and promised a reader to laugh at some person, as the others have done it already. Such clickbait model is the following: it contains the marker of a laughter speech act, the object being laughed at – some phenomenon that breaks rules and norms. This type of headlines provides for the names of the sources of the comicality, though they are not further disclosed. Using the names of laughter speech acts in indefinite-personal meaning ensures the impression that the stated source of the comic is being laughed at by everybody. Due to the joint social action, the reader is supposed to join a message to continue communication. Thus, the headline contains the narrative of a funny situation; the contact-establishing intention is being realized. Often, the attention is attracted by promising to laugh at something extraordinary, some clumsy and strange things.

The second type is made up of so-called **"offering" headlines** containing no information on the source of comicality, though promising some entertainment to the reader. Often, the object of derision is implied in political opponents of Russia, e.g.:

(9) Спикера Рады **развеселила** инаугурация Зеленского (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/05/20/parubii/) –

"Rada speaker was livened up by the inauguration of Zelensky",

where the referral to the name of a politician, attended with a commentary demonstrating a laughter reaction, is used as some kind of a "hook". The text referred to by the clickbait is about the dissolution of Verkhovnaya Rada by the president of Ukraine. This moment is a dramatic one in the history of the country and it usually provokes no laughter. Meanwhile, the text mentions the reaction to the dissolution act by Andriy Parubiy, when he characterized the inauguration of a new president Vladimir Zelensky as a funny one, as well as reaction to this statement expressed of the deputies of Verkhovnaya Rada meeting it with a burst of laughter. Contact-establishing effect of a clickbait is increased due to introducing an informal word *развеселила* (was livened up) to

the context of usual terminology. The collision of lexical units stylistics appears as it introduces some ironic implication to the headline. Readers are suggested that they find out its reasons. Though the text states that the president of Ukraine announced disbanding of Verkhovnaya Rada and gave the deputies two months to meet his requirements, and Andriy Parubiy, a speaker of Verkhovnaya Rada, is just slightly mentioned as well as him saying that the inauguration of a new president Vladimir Zelensky is a funny one, and the deputies met these words with a burst of laughter. An allusion is used (namely a hint, that Zelensky is a former comic actor and the deputies consider his presidential activities as a continuation of his former activities). Thus, Russian mass media continues to take advantage of the topic of the "might-have-been state control establishment" in Ukraine. The ambivalence in the attitude to the president of Ukraine, with everybody expecting a burst of laughter at him, is used as a "hook" to attract the reader's attention in Russia. Turned up expectations are formed due to the fact that there is no mentioning of the reasons provoking the laughter of the deputies of Verkhovnaya Rada.

One more heavily ridiculed object in today's Russian mass media is the prime minister of Great Britain Theresa May:

(10) Премьер Британии поблагодарила Бориса Джонсона и **рассмешила** парламент (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2018/07/10/theresa/) – "Prime minister of Great Britain thanked Boris Johnson and made the Parliament laugh".

The text states that Theresa May thanked the Minister of International affairs Boris Johnson barely containing the laughter at "the passion he had while advancing country's interests", and this way she triggered laughter of all the attendees. Boris Johnson left the post of the Head of the Foreign office as he was opposing the measures taken by Theresa May, who was demanding a stricter scenario of the country's exit from the supranational union. The headline misleads the readers, as some logical links connecting the predicates are left not clear: whether the laughter of the Parliament was caused by the gratefulness of the Prime minister or the Prime minister has become the reason for the laughter herself or the fact that her gratefulness was addressed to Boris Johnson.

In order to find it out, readers have to go through the text following the clickbait.

The promise of laughter is contained in the following example as well:

(11) Представление российского игрока в НХЛ **рассмешило** пользователей сети (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/07/30/lol_goose/) – "The introduction Russian hockey player to the NHL team made Internet surfers laugh".

In this case, the headline can be named bivalent: the names of a derision object (*the introduction of a Russian hockey player*) and laughter subject (*Internet users*) are given to indicate the laughter reaction. The very situation does not give any explanation. Thus, the author of the headline ensures the effect of turned up expectations by using a word referring to the semantic field named "comicality". Hint to the possible laughter reaction becomes a so-called "hook", and this way it incites a desire to read the following text.

Hint to the comic nature of the situation is present in the article headlined:

(12) Незадачливый ухажер **выдал** набор фактов о себе и **рассмешил** пользователей сети (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/04/30/mujchina/) – "Down-on-his-luck boyfriend has revealed some facts about himself and made Internet users laugh".

Here, we again face a not fully informative headline containing a lot of hints with no explanation to the questions appearing while reading the article. Characteristic of the laughter object attracts attention due to a casual word *boyfriend*. Here it is used ironically in combination with an adjective *незадачливый* (down-on-his-luck), defining a naive person. Lexical unit "*выдал* (revealed, disclosed)" suggests comic nature of the action in this context as well. The semantics of the comic element is increased with each word contained in the headline. The very situation provoking laughter is left unclear.

(13) Парней из Tinder **подняли на смех** (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/04/25/typical_tinder/) – "Guys from Tinder were ridiculed".

The text headlined tells the story of Jon Foor from Los Angeles, scriptwriter working for UCB Theatre. Together with friends, he made a mock video to show an "average guy from Tinder". The headline uses a casual phraseological unit "to

ridicule" to make somebody an object to be laughed at. As all the forms are similar, the author of the video got the feeling that he is looking through the pages of the same person. Comic effect is created due to the literalization of the set phrase *поднять на смех* (literally "to raise on laugh") which is usually understood as "to laugh somebody out", "to ridicule", though in the context (after reading the text) it is perceived in the meaning of "writing a comic play scene that will make somebody laugh".

(14) Пациент с опухолью мозга принялся **шутить** прямо во время операции (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/04/07/joker/) –
"Medical patient suffering from a tumour started to joke right during the surgery".

The article headlined tells that after the patient comes round from anaesthetic he asks whether the surgeons have taken his brain outside. This phrase gives no reason to laugh. Though the headline intrigues readers by means of disturbing situation's picture. Within the situation, the patient stays unconscious, and the possibility to laugh in this case is more likely a mystification. Moreover, the magnetism of the given headline is related to the referral to a taboo subject: health, surgeries, etc. Most commonly, these topics are not laughed at and pose no reason to laugh. The attractive nature of the headline is ensured by means of interfering with private life.

While speaking about taboo topics, we cannot but mention that such clickbaits, which authors refer to as "below-the-belt" topics, are often used. Inclusion of this topic into a "comic" headline is expected to strengthen "a standpoint of a headline".

(15) Телеведущие **расшутились** о пенисе во время эфира (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/04/22/lil_or_big_dicky/) –
"TV presenters couldn't stop joking about penis during the broadcast".

This headline constitutes a sentence with a message on the subject of a speech act with no clarification of the nature of the discussion. In other words, here we see another bivalent headline with a hint to the situation of laughter indicating subject and object of laughter. Such delivery form of intrigues provides the effect of turned-up expectations. Everything linked with obscenity is always interesting and triggers

curiosity. This is what the author of a given headline counts on. The text is accompanied by the video taken from the British morning television show called Good Morning Britain, where the broadcaster Kate Garraway made a joke on the size of the "cock" of his colleague Richard Madeley. As is often the case, such headlines are associated with language games: laughter reaction put in the headline was realized while discussing creative activities of a rapper with an expressive pseudonym Lil Dicky, which can have "small penis" as one of the possible translation options.

(16) **Смеявшиеся** над докладом о зарплатах врачи раскрыли свой реальный заработок (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/03/28/bashkir/) –
"Doctors who were laughing at the report on doctors' salaries revealed the information on how much they earn".

The article headlined tells about the salary amounts received by the medical staff of a maternity hospital in Bashkiria. Topics that are linked to money and salary issues always provoke public interest. Moreover, curiosity is fuelled by the semantics of a secret introduced by means of the lexical unit *раскрыли* (revealed). Here, there is only one indication of the laughter subject with no further information on the situation caused laughter. The desire to read the text is provoked by turned up the expectation to learn the secret linked to the salaries issue as well as the cause of laughter.

Allusive headlines

The difference of such clickbaits is in the **nomination of a laughter act** with no reason provoking it. Meaning of such headlines is not only to provoke laughter or invite to laugh together but also to provide a hint that text contains some message being of interest for the readers. As for allusive headlines, first of all, we focus on those using comic lexical units to increase the reader's interest rather than to reveal the content of the text.

(17) He is Зе! Президент (YouTube. URL: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCp2zBKrqP0ZQF6RN4RJtF2Q) –
"Зе (in Russian)! President".

Generic name for the type of texts discussing political activities of Zelensky. In other

words, the political figure turns into a private one belonging to the circle of the closest acquaintances, who can be given a funny nickname [Vasileva, Prokofeva, 2015] and whose private life can be discussed in some leisure moments. We would pay attention to graceful language games implied in the headline: *3e* – these are the first two letters of the last name of the president of Ukraine as well as imitation of a vulgar pronunciation of the definite article in the English language. The headline's ambiguity is conveyed in the following: the fact whether the author laughs at the main character or admires his activities becomes the most intriguing part of the text as well as the means to form the effect of turned-up expectations from the text or a type of texts following.

Another example of allusive headlines can be seen in the following clickbait:

(18) **Насмешливые** школьники заставили женщину похудеть на 63 килограмма (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/06/10/zatravili/) –
"Sarcastic students made a woman lose 63 kilos";

the attention is attracted by the promise to explain how to lose 63 kilos. The semantics of comicality is conveyed in the comic subject (*students*). The very situation stated in the headline cannot be accepted as a funny one. The headline rather promises information on a person whose deed is worthy of respect or admiration. Comic object (promising the reader some interesting information to read) is a woman from the British city of Warrington, who lost weight for the sake of her daughter who was laughed at by the classmates. In this regard, we can state that semantics of comicality here is a contact-establishing means only. Further on, it is counted on supporting the contact by maintaining the interest in the actions of the main character of the article.

Another example goes about shocking the public due to the violation of behaviour stereotypes:

(19) Ребенок громко **высмеял** пренебрегающую гигиеной пассажирку самолета (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/06/07/barefooooot/) –
"A child laughed out loud at an airline passenger neglecting hygiene rules".

We can hardly expect that a child can laugh intentionally to make a monkey out of an adult.

Contact is established due to announcing something impossible: subject situation a child *высмеял* (laughed out loud) does not correlate with the expected behaviour of children. The interest of the public is provoked by the following dissonance: *neglecting hygiene*. While watching the video going before the text, we see an intentional misleading of the reader: the parent is the one who laughs, not the child. Promising communication by referring to two factors violating the image of the typical behaviour of adults and children proves effective for clickbaiting: the headline under analysis was viewed a record number of times.

(20) Дикие **пранки**, задницы и никаких правил (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/articles/2019/06/13/zdorovetsky/) –
"Wild prank calls, ass holes and lack of any rules)".

Allusive mechanism of clickbaiting is seen in the heading (20) where attention is attracted not by a lexical unit *пранки* (prank calls), but a colloquial rude word *ass hole* which indicates a subject of the comic situation. Text is accompanied by the video showing a half-naked American top-model Kinsey Wolanski entering the football field during the match between British "Tottenham" and "Liverpool". Such a thought-out campaign made up and prepared by a young guy Vitaly Zdorovetsky is aimed at the majority of views and increasing online popularity. Barbarism *prank* adopted from the English language is used in combination with the word *wild* highlighting rudeness, uncontrollability, clumsiness and strange nature of these jokes.

(21) Тренер сборной России по хоккею отреагировал на **насмешки** американских СМИ (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/05/24/vorobiev) –
"Russian hockey team coach reacted to the mockery in American mass media".

The headline uses the word *mockery* as one associated with the semantic field of comicality, though the text does not tell us that the journalist of an American newspaper laughs playing of the Russian team out. Reason for writing the article is in the comment of the head trainer of the Russian hockey team Ilya Vorobyev to the critical words of American journalist from The New York Times July Robenhaimer, who labelled the tactics

of the team as absurd in the interview to the TV channel "Russia Today". The cheating is in the fact that the text has the comments of the journalist writing for one magazine only, though after reading the text we get the impression that all American mass media sources laugh at the Russian hockey team. Clickbait meaning, as it appears, does not tell something extremely funny, but rather attracts attention to some intrigue using the words belonging to the semantic field of comicality. The word *насмешки* (mockery) provokes interest in the readers; contact-establishing potential is referred to the promise to tell us about the trainer's reaction. Thus, the conflict that is interesting for the readers is indicated. Such headlines are intended for those readers who are interested in the announced subjects and who will read the text till the very end.

The promise containing a hint to the comic character of the situation is contained in the headline:

(22) Телеведущий непристойно **пошутил** о собаке и **рассмешил** ведущую (Lenta.ru. URL: https://lenta.ru/news/2019/04/22/doggy_style) –
"TV presenter afforded a **joke** about a dog and made a female TV presenter laugh".

The text is accompanied by the video featuring a host of the American channel NBC4 David Ushery telling a story about a dog who had swam 217 kilometres and was saved by the worker of a drilling installation unit, who said that the dog "definitely gave a new meaning to the phrase 'doggy style'". Ushery immediately corrected his words saying that it was a slip of the tongue and he meant to say that doggy style meant "doggy paddle", thus making program's co-host laugh. People who are not in the know will see nothing funny in the given phrase of the American host, though in reality, it provides for a dirty joke relating to some sexual transactions. Most readers will not understand it if no translation is provided. Though everything that is dirty provokes interest, and *пошутил* (made a joke) and *рассмешил* (made somebody laugh) are some type of a "hook" for a reader. Russian readers get an association with a film clip "My doggy style".

Nominative headlines

Promising laughter markers while perceiving online content can be referred to in a lot of texts (pictures), rubrics, etc.:

(23) Странные люди в общественном транспорте или чудики среди нас: самые смешные фото (YouTube. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PCss5xyYZlE) –
"Strange people in public transport or freaks among us: the funniest photos";
(24) Самые смешные видео про котов (YouTube. URL: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBe-obq2p6OVmJSO9Eua1gg) –
"Funniest cat videos";

clarifying relations between semantically heterogeneous objects (photos, videos, news stories selections, etc.). Such headlines are mostly focused on the word with the semantics of comicality in the direct meaning of this word. They invite readers to relax and get some positive emotions (see Fig. 2).

We would like to pay attention to the following promises of the comic element: *to laugh hysterically.* Here we see an exaggerated statement proved by a casual assessment characteristic of the object provoking laughter: *"all-thumbs" photographers.* It is a light-hearted joke starting the succession of photo materials having the same light-hearted nature.

The promise of entertainment can be conveyed in clickbaits by means of using corresponding verbal nominations of comic acts: *scandals*, *hardcore stuff*, *not for weak-nerved*, *lol*, *laughed my ass off*, *prank*, *to force tears for laughter*, *it is pretty messed up*, *to scandalize*, *shock*, *secrets are revealed*, etc. Such clickbaits express the failure to meet expectations as the most often used effect in the interconnection of a headline and a text. Promised (declared) things do not correspond the reality (text content). Such examples are often found among YouTube videos, and they get in the area of interests of clickbaiting researchers (see Fig. 3).

It seems to us that it is a kind of game played with the reader. By clicking a clickbait headline the reader is ready to get frustrated. Thus, switching between clickbaits and looking for some entertainment, as if the reader was making the expectations come true: the headline does not correspond to the text content. This way Internet surfers increase their self-esteem playing a guessing game, namely, that headlines do not correspond to the text content.
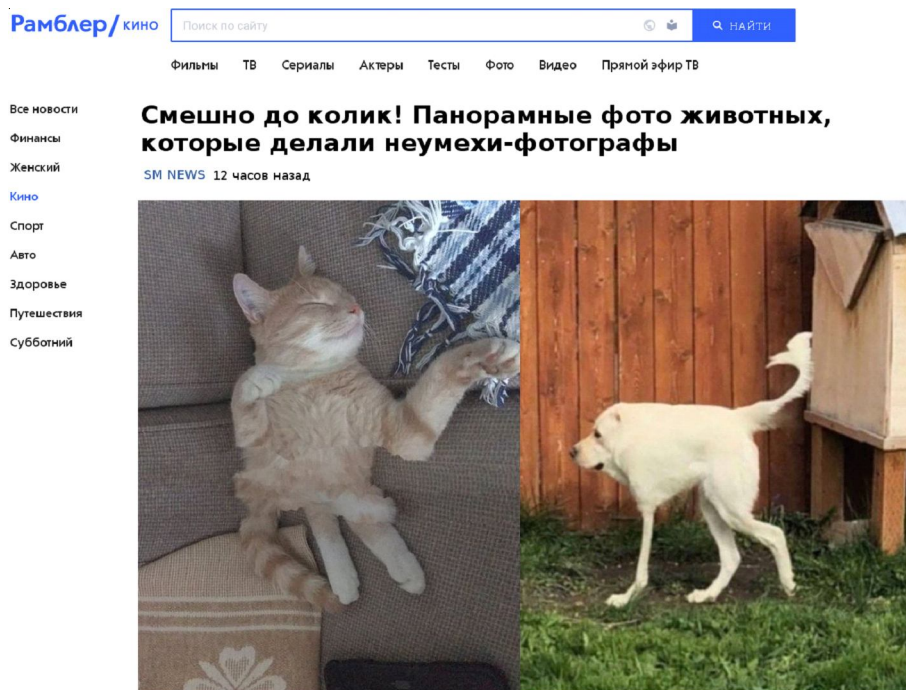
Fig. 2. An invitation to laugh:

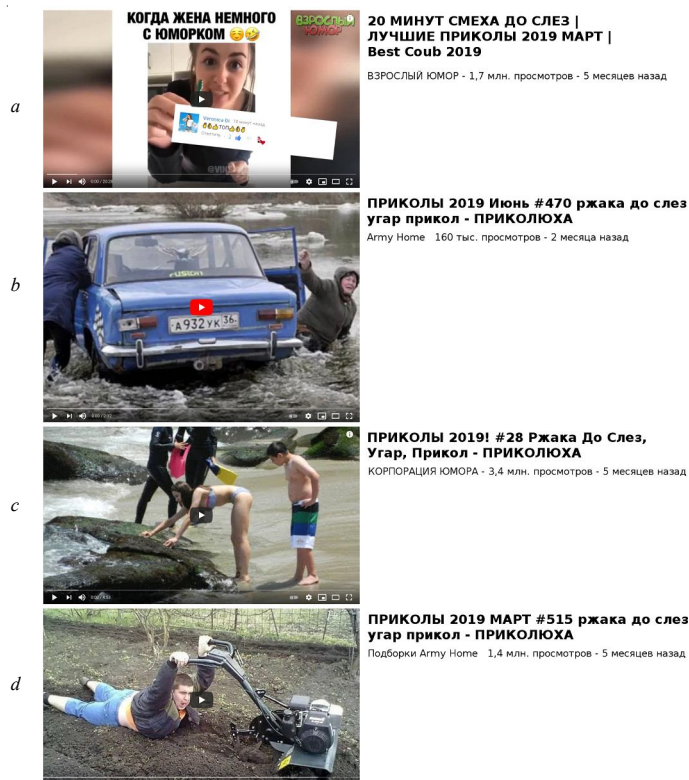*Title:* It makes you laugh hysterically! Panoramic photos of animals made by "all-thumbs" photographers

Fig. 3. An invitation to have fun:

a – 20 minutes of laughter moving to tears | Best kickers of March 2019;
b – kickers of June 2019 #470 lol moving to tears, messing up, kickers – tricks;
c – best kickers of 2019! #28 lol moving to tears, messing up, the kicker – tricks;
d – kickers of March 2019 #515 lol moving to tears, kickers – tricks

Conclusion

Clickbait is a communication act implying a promise to continue communication. The analysis provides a classification of clickbaits according to the techniques of attracting attention used in them. Several types of headlines are highlighted in the paper, namely narrative headings, offering headings, allusive and nominative headings.

One of often used "hooks" is promising funny and entertaining reading. In this regard, language-enabling resources of comicality are being resorted to, though a headline and a corresponding text are far from correlating with each other in terms of content. Such "hooks" are aimed at attracting as much attention as possible to "own" content.

The proposed research highlights the mechanisms of creating a clickbait in the semantic field of "funny" from the positions of the addressee, the subject of laughter, the object and the matter of laughter. This approach allows us to create a most complete description of each of the analysed clickbait headlines and sets a precedent for the further development of the given line of research.

What is noteworthy is the repetitiveness and uniformity of analysed headings, which confirms the possibility of developing a model for identifying clickbaits in each of the designated semantic fields. Moreover, from our point of view, it is the lexical model that is especially promising, since keywords allow us to detect clickbait most easily and quickly.

The properties of the structure of clickbait promising message:

– the subject of a speech act aimed at involving readers in the situation implying laughter;

– the object of a comic reaction implying laughter;

– user;

– attracting attention to some interesting information.

Clickbaits are often accompanied by some shocking value provoking the referral to the taboo topics ("below-the-belt" topics), suggesting that readers laugh at the things that usually provoke no laughter (death, physical disadvantages, etc.). Promise message attracts attention by implementing an active usage of various language expressive means such as phraseological units, conversational vocabulary, precedent names, verbal markers of comicality and expressive lexical units.

As clickbait is easier and quicker by using keywords, the most significant role is played by the following lexical units: *laughed out*, *are laughing*, *was laughed at*, *has livened up*, *made a joke*, *started joking*, *laughing*, *made laughing*, *ridiculed*, *couldn't stop joking*, *smiled*, *had somebody in stitches*, *to mock*, *refused joking around*. We view clickbait as a means of hypertext formation usually based on the appeal to join those who have already enjoyed reading the news. A significant place in a clickbait phenomenon is occupied by the headlines implying direct or indirect promises to make readers laugh. Verbal and non-verbal means are used in the process of clickbait formation to indicate the reaction implying laughter. It constitutes a so-called hook used to involve the user in the communication act. Having learnt the details, readers are not always eager to laugh, though the actor of a communication act hopes to increase "appeal's" productivity.

NOTE

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