

**Jan Baudouin de Courtenay and Opinion Journalism:  
The Category of the Sender in the Journalistic Texts of the Famous Linguist**

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Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, a world-renowned linguist, for his contemporaries was also recognised as a prolific journalist. Nowadays, his legacy as a publicist<sup>1</sup> has faded in the public memory, but the reason for that does not reside in the doubtful quality of his texts. To the contrary, these texts were important in the public exchange of views presented in the press, catching the readers' attention thanks to bravely formulated opinions and an outstanding journalistic style. Experts in the history of literature and language also perceive J. B. de Courtenay's articles as very well-written [Kulczycka-Saloni 1983: 7; Doroszewski 1974: 9]. What made them fall into oblivion was mainly their characteristic feature, i.e. their evanescence deriving from the opinion journalism's dependency on actuality, the current state of affairs.<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this paper is to identify the selected communicational roles of the sender assumed by the author of the journalistic texts. Only these J. B. de Courtenay's articles were taken into consideration which were published in Polish in newspapers and magazines. The gesture of leaving aside texts printed in the form of voluminous booklets (approx. 50-70 pages), often released at the author's own expense, makes the source material more consistent. It is constituted of articles of similar length that were accepted by the editor and/or publisher for press publication. The paper draws its data from two Polish collections of works by J. B. de Courtenay.<sup>3</sup>

The category of the sender as an integral element of the sender-receiver model of communication is treated here as a textual manifestation of the author's intention to establish a form of interaction, and textual images of interlocutors. In the case of a non-literary text, its author and subject were not usually differentiated [Bartmiński 2008: 167]. However, the example of a publicist text is liminal: serving practical purposes, it may have literary features, at least to some extent. This is a strong argument for considering the sender as the author's textual creation and keeping these two non-identical, although closely linked, "speaking persons" separately.

Following such understanding of the sender category, I examined the source material from the perspective of the text-based discourse studies.<sup>4</sup> In the course of the research two main roles of the sender were identified: a commentator and polemicist.<sup>5</sup>

#### **The Commentator Role**

To begin with, the category of the sender in the analysed texts of J.B. de Courtenay is omnipresent and firmly instantiated with the grammatical category of the 1<sup>st</sup> person both sin-

<sup>1</sup> His publicist writing is counted in hundreds. The bibliography of his journalistic works from 1865-1929 comprises 345 titles and still is not a comprehensive list of his articles [see Baudouin de Courtenay 2007: 563-583].

<sup>2</sup> The same happened to other prominent publicists of past eras, while in some cases (like B. Prus or E. Orzeszkowa) the memory of journalistic works was kept alive owing to other achievements of their authors, especially in fiction writing [Kulczycka-Saloni 1983: 9].

<sup>3</sup> These are: Baudouin de Courtenay, 1983 and 2007; further we use the abbreviations, where [B1] stands for 1983 edition, while [B2] – for 2007 edition.

<sup>4</sup> Discourse both as a theoretical notion and a defined method of text interpretation is very popular in contemporary Polish studies, not only in linguistics. Discourse, existing as a term "under construction", still evokes discussion in the academic community. In an attempt to define this phenomenon I follow the B. Witosz's stance on this matter, assuming that discourse is a type of a culturally-determined and institutionalized social practice [Witosz 2009: 59-71]. The Polish-oriented concept of discourse has its roots in the long and rich tradition of stylistics, ethnolinguistics, sociolinguistics and genre studies [Witosz 2012a, 2012b].

<sup>5</sup> For other types of roles, identified in feuilletons, see more at Pietrzak [2013: 187-235].

gular and plural. As far as the former is concerned, it occurs regularly, sometimes being even deliberately overused by the author to express his attitude clearly; see an example: "Otóż **ja** także **jestem** antymilitarystą I to do tego stopnia, że wszelką wojnę [...] **uważam** za zbrodnię. **Zastrzegam** się jednak [...]. **Ja jestem** antymilitarystą [...]. **Uważam** za obowiązek [...], a omijanie podobnych sposobności jest w **moich** oczach [...]" [B2: 520-521].

However, with reference to the latter, the plural forms are used scarcely, and while the singular 1<sup>st</sup> person aims at sharpening the presented opinion, the plural is introduced to express thoughts mildly. Hence, the majority of the plural structures fall into the category of "we" inclusive, which is typical for situations when the presence of receivers (potential readers of a given text) is recognised [see B1: 172; B2: 546, 548-550].

The subjectivity of a journalistic text, as highlighted above, correlates with the press commentary genre<sup>1</sup>, in which visible sender category plays the pivotal role affecting the form and the content of its textual representations: the author commenting on the important current affairs has to be visible in the stated opinions (the cognitive aspect) as well as in the structural, pragmatic and stylistic aspects of text. Also, the source material discussed here demonstrates numerous genre determinants which lead us to see it as a type of comment<sup>2</sup>, with the proviso that genological typology, not categorisation, is applied. What is more, one needs to remember that genres of journalistic discourse are perceived as ones with remarkably blurred boundaries.

As a result of the above, it seems that the sender takes some steps –discursive strategies – to convince the receiver that the presented view in an article is valuable and worth endorsing. These strategies can be concentrated on the textual creation either of the sender or the receiver, helping to create the positive relation between the interlocutors. In the present study we turn only to the sender-based strategies, bearing in mind the aim of this paper and J. B. de Courtenay's reluctance to apply explicit persuasiveness in attracting the readers' attention. These strategies result in two main commentator's subtypes, i.e. educator and counsellor.

The first subtype, **educator**, is closely connected with the academic experience of the author. Such predominant factors as: significant usage of declaratives and deontic expressions, the presence of rhetoric questions, neatly delivered line of thought, and elaborate segmentation of text are undoubtedly of scholarly provenance. They contribute to the journalistic image of the sender who tends to express his opinions *ex cathedra*, in an authoritative style. Furthermore, that kind of asserting his authority observed in the collected texts could make the potential readers resentful [see Kulczycka-Saloni 1983: 8-9], mainly because of the disturbance of the balance in the sender-receiver interaction changed into the master and his pupil relation. Notwithstanding, such creation reinforces the public awareness that the author of the text printed in a newspaper is a professor and by virtue of being a member of the intellectual elite has knowledge, and thus right, to educate. J. B. de Courtenay presents himself as a shrewd observer of reality with extensive understanding of current events. Such image is confirmed in texts not only through the richly signalled intertextual links to journalistic pieces (by him and others), but also through quoting received letters, heard anecdotes and commonly held opinions on the burning issues of the present day. It seems that the author of texts portrays himself as a savant and active participant of public life.

The second subtype, **counsellor**, is less frequent in the studied material. But the transformation of tone is obvious, although still the sender-receiver relations are not equal and the sender is in the privileged position. It is a modality that changes: instead of the mentor voice, we can observe the assumptions (verifiable ones) and unverifiable opinions [see Grzegorzcy-

<sup>1</sup> The wide presentation of press genres is delivered in the significant monograph of M. Wojtak [2004].

<sup>2</sup> In this context meaningful could be the name given by J. B. de Courtenay for one of his articles – "mały felieton" ('small feuilleton') [B2: 535], which exceedingly differs from other his works.

kowa 2012: 47-52], introduced with mental verbs, such as: "przypuszczam" ('I suppose'), "sądzę" ('I think'), etc.

### The Polemicist Role

The second role of the sender that we can elicit from the studied material can be called the polemicist role. The most evident places in the text to observe the polemical role (provided that the object of study, given text, does not represent the polemic genre itself) are these passages in which other opinions are questioned. Aside from this apparent strategy, there is some evidence that the creation of the sender, in this case aiming at debunking the absurdities of everyday life, is based on three strategies.

The first is the sender's ironic attitude expressed mainly towards these people who appear in press texts in the 3<sup>rd</sup> form (singular or plural), i.e. they belong neither to the sender nor the receiver category. Expressions used to describe them can be easily put into the class of invectives (e.g., "upośledzony na umyśle urzędnik prowincjonalny" [B1: 88]; "zamroczone i słabo funkcjonujące głowy" [B2: 519]; "udają głuptasków" [B2: 543]), yet one should admit that this type of irony does not spare even the author himself (e.g., "posiadam bardzo wiele szpetnych i ohydnych właściwości" [B2: 529]). Not only is harsh irony present, but also some jocularly exists in the journalism of J. B. de Courtenay, albeit in a remotely attested way. It is worth underlying that the supposed reader, according to the texts, is not usually an object of fun.

The second strategy consists in playing with the other textual forms, other genres and/or styles. The most prominent are the following: report, the minutes, statement, declaration, exemplum, etc.

The third tendency serving the polemicist role of the sender is the usage of aphorisms and points made in the final sentences of texts. J. B. de Courtenay is known as an author of "Myśli nieoportunistyczne" for his precision in putting a deep thought in a short form of a sentence. Such aphorisms and final remarks are used to change the rhythm of narration what results in the more dynamic structure of a text [see B1: 219, 240; B2: 545].

The overall extraordinary picture of the sender in publicist texts written by J. B. de Courtenay is complex and in order to grasp it fully, there is a need for further study, incorporating the longer pieces of his journalistic work and texts printed in other languages as well. The image of the sender should not be ordinary; the challenge of uniqueness is met in the collected materials.

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