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**NARRATIVE IN THE FIELD OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS:
THE APPROACHES OF MOST CITED PAPERS
ON WEB OF SCIENCE**

Narrative theory as a scientific approach emerged in the field of literary studies and, at first, was used for the analysis of fiction. In the second half of the 20th century, works of poststructuralists, who perceived reality to be kind of a text, led to the spread of the narratology in the humanities: history, psychology, sociology, political and communication studies. The digital times have made narratology more popular than ever. However, in the field of Ukrainian political studies, narrative analysis is used quite rarely. Thus, this study aims to define the key characteristics of the term «narrative» and the ways of its studying in the most cited publications in the Web of Science base (in the fields of Political Studies and Communications).

Study of research in the field of narrative and political communications helps us to underline five main characteristics of a narrative. Narrative is a suitable form for making sense of reality – both in the everyday life and in the political studies. Within the latter, a dominant and alternative narratives may be differentiated, whereas a question about the ratio of official and alternative narratives remains mainly unanswered, and in the digital times in particular. Additionally a narrative have a reference possibility, thus it's always connected to some extra-textual (or extra-narrative) features, and an audience should add some additional knowledge to interpret a story. However, a political narrative should have a factual basis and to reflect the reality (for a literature narrative it's not obligatory). Narrative is also linear and predictable. As far as a narrative has a plot, it helps to put in in a temporal sequence some facts and events. Thus, meanings of a narrative are predestined, sometimes a narrative may be a reason for biased attitudes. And to sum up, a narrative has dramatic nature and engaging character. Thus, as a rule, an audience perceive a narrative uncritically.

Keywords: *political narrative, characteristics of narrative, narrative plot, perception of a narrative*

Narrative theory as a scientific approach emerged in the field of literary studies and, at first, was used for the analysis of fiction. Works of Russian structuralists – Mikhail Bakhtin and Vladimir Propp – are considered fundamental for narratology. Bakhtin claims that there is always a dialogue between an author and a character, and a text should contain a polyphony, a variety of voices, which are conducted by the author.

In the second half of the 20th century, works of poststructuralists, who perceived reality to be kind of a text and objectivity to be dead, led to the spread of the narratology in the humanities: history, psychology, sociology, political and communication studies. Pursuant to the narrative theory, the reality-text is constructed with the help of different narrators, whose narratives compete with each other. However, all these narratives are not complete because narrators select and interpret facts according to their worldview, ideology, professional tasks, etc.

The digital times have made narratology more popular than ever. According to Ganz, it was the narrative, which helped Obama to win the election in 2008 [13]. «The battle of narratives» concept is used in modern propaganda and conflict perception studies (the US war against terrorism vs Al Qaeda's narratives [10]; Western countries vs pro-Islamic State's narratives [23]; Russia vs the West narratives [20]). In reality of alternative facts, post-truth and post-factual democracy [16], «impolitics» [21], anti-politics [9] narratives may be much more powerful than facts. Personalization of modern politics also makes narratives a leading form of political communication [1], [24]. However, in the field of Ukrainian political studies, narrative analysis is used quite rarely. Our search in Vernadsky National Library electronic collection of PhD theses in political studies did not show any results. There were only several research papers, whereas scholars in other fields (sociology, psychology, philosophy, history and, of course, philology) widely exploit the narrative approach. Thus, this study aims to define the key characteristics of the term «narrative» and the ways of its studying in the most cited publications in the Web of Science base (in the fields of Political Studies and Communications).

Key characteristics of narrative*Making sense of reality*

Narratives are the basic form for sense construction, people use them to understand reality they live in. Narratives are widely constructed by all people «to weave together fragmented observations to construct meanings and realities» [19, p. 36]. Fischer even uses such term as «Homo Narrans» to underline this, «the narrative paradigm sees people as storytellers – authors and co-authors who creatively read and evaluate the texts of life and literature. It envisions existing institutions as providing ‘plots’ that are always in the process of re-creation rather than as scripts; it stresses that people are full participants in the message-making, whether they are agents (authors) or audience members (co-authors)» [12].

As far as the narration becomes the only way to understand reality, all people («agents» and «co-authors») are taking part in the ongoing process. In this idyllic picture all the people are active in designing the narrative. However, we may claim that some «agents» come along with more persuasive narratives or have more resources to reach agenda with their «stories».

Jones and Mcbeth tell about similar «democratic» way to form a narrative in studying politics, «First, in policy areas of high uncertainty, complexity, and polarization, policy narratives... and arguments... are identified. Second, alternative narratives that do not conform to the dominant policy narrative(s) defined in step 1 are identified. Next, the two groups of stories identified in steps 1 and 2 are compared and a grand policy metanarrative is derived from the comparison» [18]. Here we do not know, how to measure the ratio of «dominant» and «alternative» narratives. However, this may be important to evaluate both quality and diversity of the «metanarrative».

Some scholars claim that there are some leading actors in general narrative production. For instance, McComas calls mass media a «most visible and important storyteller» [19]. However, politicians may also use narratives to explain their actions or reach the voters [25]. There is also a research in the state narrative, which dominates some social groups, for instance, asylum seekers (See [3]). Considering the function of narrative in the organizations, Mumby states, «narratives not only evolve as product of certain power structures, but also function ideologically to produce, maintain and reproduce those power structures» [22, p. 113]. We may suppose that in the organizations as well as in politics official (or dominant) and alternative narratives coexist. However, the official narrative, having some features, which differentiate it from others, has some priorities and is perceived as more significant.

Mumby believes that narratives in the organizations «often articulate an organizational reality that is accepted as ‘the natural order’ and ‘an ideological force’ that articulates a system of meanings which privileges certain interests over others» [22, p. 114]. This peculiarity of a narrative may work in politics and society as well, where resources may predefine the construction of more powerful narrative.

However, there is a question about the ratio of official and alternative narratives in digital times. Studying protest networks during the 2009 G20 London Summit, Bennett and Segerberg found out that the more personalized opportunities a coalition adopt, the stronger network it may maintain [1, p. 25]. Thus, the Internet encourages the production of personalized narratives and helps common people form networks, as a result, their narrative salience may increase.

One more observation of making sense of reality. According to Capoccia and Kelemen, narratives may be used not only by common people but the narratives may also help recreate decisive or «troubled» periods in politics. Narrative unites diverse decisions and actions in one story and «reconstruct the possible outcomes of the decisions that were made and... the possible outcomes of those that could have been made but were not» [7, 357]. And here we must define narrative as a «a particular category of communication and a method of cognitive organization» [18, p. 329-330].

A possibility to refer «to some beliefs and desires»

Bevir and colleagues define narrative as «a form of explanation that works by relating actions to the beliefs and desires that produce them» [2]. These beliefs or desires may be personal or collective ones. According to the scientists, conditional connections such as beliefs and desires are essential for narratives. Additionally, narratives «explain actions and practices without evoking the idea of necessity» (as in natural sciences) [2].

Thus, narratives work in the sphere of subjectivity, have explanatory nature and help to form individual experiences. Moreover, narratives are flexible and put us in reality of contested stories (as far as narratives are based on our «desires and beliefs», some of them may be more enjoyable and trustful). However, Bevir and colleagues claim that it is important to differentiate narratives in fiction and narratives in political studies, «Political scientists offer us narratives that strive, to the best of the narrator’s ability, to capture

the way in which events did happen in the past or are happening today, whereas writers of fiction need not to do so. Political scientists cannot ignore the facts, although we must accept that no fact is simply given to them» [2].

Narrative linearity and predictability

Jones and McBeth add to the definition some formal elements: «a story with a temporal sequence of events unfolding in a plot» [18], thus, it is an explanation in the form of a story with a plot, which determines certain order of events. As explained by McComas and Shanahan, «Plots generally require a sequential, linear unfolding» [19, p. 37]. Here also a term «narrative arc» may be used. The arc is a narrative logic, which determines some consequence of events.

As far as we have a story with a plot, some «dramatic moments» and characters are also required. In their definition, Jones and McBeth do not mention a possibility of a narrative to refer to anything, however, they claim that a narrative contains «symbols» (which may be interpreted with a reference to something) and «archetypes» [18]. For the authors, the archetypes are connected with the characters. Besides, Jones and McBeth argue that the narrative «culminates in a moral to the story» [18]. Their definition has both – formal characteristic of a narrative (the plot, dramatic techniques and a special type of ending – moral culmination) and interpretative ones, symbols, archetypes and the moral as well – moral refers to special norms and beliefs.

Narratives may be perceived not only as plots, where the outcome may be foreseen, but also as a stricter form – a «script», which generates people's attitudes towards reality they live in (however, Fischer denies comparing narrative and script, as far as the construction of the narrative is an ongoing process, whereas the script is predefined) [12].

However, the term «script» may be used in a kind of behaviorist understanding of reality, where narratives are some models, which define our way of thinking. For instance, Gilliam and Iyengar discovered the repeated plot in crime stories: «the 'target' actions are marked by the sequence» and «there is a clear sense of what is to come» [14, p. 563]. Thus, repeated events, formed in a linear narrative sequence, may cause some biased perceptions. According to the authors, narrative fixes some characteristics of a social group (they write about the race), because authors of the narratives (journalists in this case) in order to reach a larger audience may exaggerate some sensitive topics [14, p. 570].

Speaking of a narrative plot/script, we should consider the issue of predictability. Taking into account different events or character's attributes, one may make a conclusion about the whole story meaning or refer through symbols or archetypes to certain beliefs, desires or morals. Thus, we should question free interpretation of the narrative. To combine different elements in a narrative or a story, one needs to select some facts, characteristics and to ignore others. This concerns a narratee as well. By this connection, Mumby marks several ways of narrative readings: «political reading of narrative exploits, seeking to create a disjunction between the privileged (dominant, ideological) reading and that constructed by the reader/listener» [22, p. 114]. Thus, there are some markers in a narrative, which direct a process of sense-making. However, here we speak only about a political, not literary narrative, which may be opened for free interpretations.

Predestination of meanings and narrative vs framing/priming

A narrative may define the way of interpretation, and, thus, it limits the plurality of meanings, which potentially may be assigned to an event or a person. In his famous paper, Entman compares news media narratives of two similar incidents: the US shot down an Iranian plane and Soviet Union shot down a Korean jet. The scientist discloses two different stories, where the air crash was presented as a «technical error» (the 1st case) and «massacre» (the 2nd case). The scholar is known for framing researches, yet in the paper he claims that the frames become salient only within the narrative, «Comparing media narratives of events that could have been reported similarly helps to reveal the critical textual choices that framed the story but would otherwise remain submerged in an undifferentiated text» [11, p. 6].

One more interesting observation: mass media narratives do not contradict official ones. In political advertisement, some narrative techniques may be deliberately created to underline a desirable meaning. Valentino and colleagues establish implicit and explicit types of «racial messages» and narrative references in the texts [25, p. 76]. The scholars use the concept of priming (the activation technique of certain topics in order to cause specific thoughts among the audience) and explain the influence of some techniques on the audience's attitudes formation, for instance, a narrator's comments [25, p. 87].

Both these approaches – framing and priming – emerged within the agenda-setting theory, where powerful institutions, like government, politicians, big business control public agenda. Thus, the narrative within this paradigm may also contain «traces of power».

Engaging character of the narrative

As far as the narratives provide for the selection of facts and meanings, they usually simplify reality and give an impression of order and comfort. Apart from that, a dramatic character of a narrative helps the audience to enjoy a story. Thus, simple narrative structure may help some social institutions to communicate complex issues, for instance, global climate change. McComas and Shanahan claim that it is essential for society to be acknowledged with social problems, and, it is important to consider a «dramatic» character of the narrative journalism [19, p. 36]. The scholars suggest a term «narrative cycle» to explain mass media attention to environmental issue: «The story begins with a crescendo of dramatic claims... that attracts attention to the issue, peaks with efforts to solve the problem, and then advances to a denouement and resolution of the story» [19, p. 38].

So, the dramatic elements of a narrative attract attention, and after that, the audience is placed inside a story. Green and colleagues state that a «narrative world» exists, the audiences enjoy it and associate themselves with narrative characters [15]. Here we should note the uncritical character of the narrative perception. Studies by Cin and colleagues support this thesis, «when people are cognitively and emotionally invested in a story, they are left with less ability (mental resources) or motivation to resist the targeted message» [8]. One more interesting observation of the authors is the reason of weak resistance to a narrative: narrative is usually something that was seen by someone. Thus it is more persuasive because it has a witness. Thus it is easier to believe someone, than check facts by yourself.

To study a narrative influence, scholars also look for some components of narratives, which contribute to engagement with a narrative. Busselle and Bilandzic designed a scale to measure narrative engagement with several dimensions: narrative understanding, attentional focus, emotional engagement, and narrative presence [6]. In their second paper, the authors discuss the cases when the audience perceives a narrative as unreal: fictionality, external realism (match with external reality), and narrative realism (coherence within a story) [5].

Conclusion

Telling stories is a basic human need. With the help of stories people teach and entertain each other, communicate their experience, understand themselves. And of course, narratives may be widely used in the public sphere as means of persuasion, form of explanations and attracting attention. Additionally, narratives have some possibilities for manipulation, thus, in the times of information overload, «speed culture» such simple forms of communication may distort the reality. Moreover, nowadays narratives may be constructed by activists and protesters, who spread the virally on the Internet. And in Ukraine, where the hybrid war has been launched by Russia, narrative studies in the field of political communications should be more widespread.

As far as our review considered the most cited publications in Web of Science, we don't define the peculiarities of a narrative in the digital times, however, it might be a significant question.

Study of research in the field of narrative and political communications helps us to underline the main characteristics of a narrative. Narrative is a suitable form for making sense of reality – both in the everyday life and in the political studies. Within the latter, a dominant and alternative narratives may be differentiated, whereas a question about the ratio of official and alternative narratives remains mainly unanswered, and in the digital times in particular. Additionally a narrative have a reference possibility, thus it's always connected to some extra-textual (or extra-narrative) features, and an audience should add some additional knowledge to interpret a story. However, a political narrative should have a factual basis and to reflect the reality (for a literature narrative it's not obligatory). Narrative is also linear and predictable. As far as a narrative has a plot, it helps to put in in a temporal sequence some facts and events. Thus, meanings of a narrative are predestined, sometimes a narrative may be a reason for biased attitudes. And to sum up, a narrative has dramatic nature and engaging character. Thus, as a rule, an audience perceive a narrative uncritically.

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Стеблина Н. О. Наратив у царині політичних комунікацій: підходи до вивчення у найбільш цитованих статтях із бази даних Web of Science

Теорія наративу як науковий напрям з'явилася у царині літературознавства і спочатку використовувалося для аналізу художніх творів. Однак у другій половині ХХ ст. роботи структуралістів, які сприймали реальність як текст, призвели до того, що наративи стали предметом вивчення у гуманітаристиці: соціології, політології, історії та ін. Популярним цей напрям лишається і сьогодні, за часів цифрової культури. Незважаючи на широке поширення наратології у роботах західних учених, в Україні, у царині політичних комунікацій наративи рідко стають предметом вивчення. Саме тому метою цього дослідження є огляд найбільш цитованих досліджень із політичної комунікації, що вивчають наратив, із бази даних Web of Science, та визначення провідних характеристик терміну «наратив».

Усього виокремлено п'ять таких характеристик. Перша – наратив є формою осмислення реальності, що може здійснюватися як щоденному житті, так і для вивчення політичних процесів.

В межах останнього підходу можуть виокремлюватися домінуючий і альтернативні наративи. Проте їхнє співвідношення у політичному дискурсі лишається невивченим. Друга – здатність наративу відсилати до певних вірувань та бажань. При цьому політичні наративи на відміну від художніх мають базуватися ще на фактах і відбивати реальність. Третя – лінійність і передбачуваність наративу. Оскільки наратив містить сюжет, він допомагає упорядкувати події та явища у часову послідовність.

Окрім того, із точки зору біхейвористського підходу, наратив може порівнюватися зі «сценарієм» і містити моделі поведінки чи розуміння явищ чи подій. Таким чином, він забезпечує передбачувану реакцію на них, а інколи навіть призводить до породження упереджень. Четверта – обмеженість інтерпретації значень наративу. Наратив політичний на відміну від художнього обмежує множину значень і може містити у собі «відбитки влади», тобто просувати ті значення, які були у нього закладені. П'ята – драматична природа і здатність до залучення аудиторії. Завдяки цій характеристиці наратив зазвичай сприймається некритично і має значну переконуючу здатність.

Ключові слова: політичний наратив, характеристики наративу, сюжет наративу, сприйняття наративу