On the edge of mistake:
problems and solutions in protest research

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Project «Voices Of Protest In Russia»: Fieldwork At Rallies And Design Of A Database

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Whom do we research?

Our research project «Voices of protest» is focused on communicative messages between protesters and their addressees (See *Pic. 1* and *Table 2*).

The theoretical background is based on the theory of communicative act, especially communicative act as a way of constructing the social reality (Searle, Ostin, Van Dijk). During the 1970-80 the theory of speech acts was rather successfully applied to the analysis of the social reality and rituals.

The key terms. The key point for an interpretation of rally as a communicative act are the "silent" and the "speaking" participant. A "silent participant" is a person who just came to a rally without any verbal/nonverbal sign of protest/support, and we count his position as a "weak" ("silent") message (closed to *writing degree zero* by Roland Barthes) and it is not included in the database.

On the other hand, «strong messages» (explicit) are signs, «expressed» by rally participants, who explicitly show their political motivation. For instance, if someone either wears a *vyshivanka* (see *Table 1, column 2*), or carries a placard with the text "All you need is love", or attaches a peace symbol to his/her jacket it means that he/she wishes to express his/her political position in public, and that is considered as a "strong" message. The protesters with strong messages can use different ways for attracting public attention: verbal, visual, actional or audial (see *Table 1*), or can combine different methods. All signs (verbal and non-verbal), carried by one person, are referred in this database as "semiotic complex". All other terms used for description of rally are shown in Table 2.

Pic. 1. Rally as a communicative act: the main concept of database
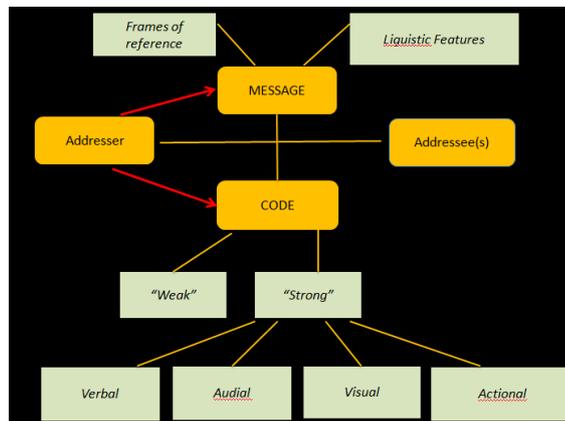
Table 1. Types of strong messages

Verbal	Visual	Actional

Methods of research: fieldwork and database

Our interdisciplinary research group made participant observations of the rallies and collected interviews and photos of verbal (slogans) and non-verbal signs of protest or support. Immediately after each rally we are writing a field diary.

For the fieldwork we used two groups – photographers (group 1, 4-15 people) and interviewers (group 2, 3-10 people). The interviewers contact people with verbal or non-verbal signs of protest, while the photographers make pictures of them. For example, after a rally (around 4 000 – 5 000 participants) usually we have a 270-350 unique pictures and 60-70 interviews.

Table 1. Fieldwork and analysis

Fieldwork	Analysis
1. Participant observation during rally; 2. Photographing protest messages (group 1); 3. Interviewing rally participants carrying messages (group 2). 4. Field work diary	4. Coding results of observation, photos and interviews into a database; 5. Applying corpus analysis methods to the database

Database by Sept, 1th 2016 consists of:
- *Over 60 rallies, marches, pickets*
- *7 cities*
- *Over 9 000 entries*
- *Over 550 interviews*

The main goals:
- Reconstruct political language
- Focus on "strong" political statements
- Make quantitative research of public protest discourse
- Distinguish between occasional and typical messages
- Trace the dynamics of political messages
- Estimate academic accuracy and biases of data collection

Table 2. Parameters of database

1.	**date**	dd.mm.yyyy
2.	**place**	Full name of a city. In case of smaller towns, villages, etc – full postal address (See *Dictionary*)
3.	**event**	Event
4.	**sub-event**	Sub-event (e.g. supporters of Novorossiya picketing Peace March)
5.	**#photo**	Number of photo
6.	**photographer**	See *Dictionary*
7.	**#object**	Number of semiotic complex (all signs carried by one person)
8.	**sex&features**	• M (1+ males); F (1+ females); MF (males and females in one group); N (sex unknown – a person is seen from the back, a placard is raised high above heads, etc) • Dependent adresser (ARTIFACT = placard is sticked to an artifact: tree, car, toy etc) ; (LIVE NON-HUMAN = placard is carried by an animal); (CHILD); LOST (placard is left by its carrier)
9.	**special features**	Relevant physical features of addresser (handicapped)
10.	**organization**	Name of organization (party, political movement, etc) to which the addresser belongs
11.	**interview**	Number of interview with the addresser (if any)
12.	**#of signals**	Number of strong statements on one addresser
13.	**verbal code**	Text on placard (Original language)
14.	**verbal code - translation**	Text on placard (English translation)
15.	**visual code**	Image on placard
16.	**artifact code**	Relevant artifacts (balloon, flower, ribbons, flags, clothing, etc). See *Dictionary*
17.	**audial code**	Songs, Slogans
18.	**actional code**	Activities, Performances (dancing, treading flags, etc.)
19.	**origin of code**	HAND-MADE SPONTANEOUS (hand written, made on rally); HAND-MADE PREPARED (same, but home work), MASS PRODUCED (printed, etc); HYBRID; PSEUDO HAND-MADE (pretending to be hand-made but actually mass produced)
20.	**collectivity**	Mark if statement is made by a group of people
21.	**addresser identity**	Making statement on behalf of oneself or a group: I ("I vote for peace"), WE ("we vote for peace"), GROUP ("Workers vote for peace")
22.	**zero adressee**	No addressee
23.	**appeal to ingroup**	Addressing in-group (e.g., other participants of the rally)
24.	**appeal to outgroup**	Addressing outgroup (e.g., army, mass media, etc)
25.	**appeal to individual authority**	Addressing a particular person representing authorities of one's own or another country (e.g., Putin, Obama, Sobyanin). See *Dictionary*
26.	**appeal to institutional authority**	Addressing an institute of one's own or another country (e.g., city administration, NATO, etc) See *Dictionary*
27.	**appeal to a country**	Addressing one's own or another country (e.g. Russia, USA, Ukraine)
28.	**other addressee**	Other addressee
29.	**type of appeal**	NEGATIVE (abuse), NEUTRAL, POSITIVE
30.	**linguistic features**	A second level of meaning. LANGUAGE GAME, EMOTICON, MEME, SHARADE, ABBREVIATION
31.	**structural features**	RHYME, RHYTHM, FOREIGN LANGUAGE, FONT, QUOTATION MARK
32.	**quote**	DIRECT, MODIFIED
33.	**source of quotation**	Source of quotation (movie, literature, etc)
34.	**frame of reference verbal**	Frames referring to religion, historical paradigm, mass culture, etc.
35.	**frame of reference visual**	Frames referring to religion, historical paradigm, mass culture, etc.
36.	**current topics**	News' topic to which the placard is referring
37.	**COMMENTS**	