

## The Functions and Features of Verbalics on a Radio Station Format Easy Listening

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### Abstract

Today music formats occupy a predominant number of frequencies in the Russian FM-range. Despite digital television and radio broadcasting conversion and the related internal and external modernization of the industry, radio stations continue to actively compete for the listener by offering new approaches to broadcasting and winning an audience. The number of radio stations in the modern world remains at a consistently high level, although, it is understandable that the dynamics of its growth does not have the speed it used to have a hundred years ago: for example, the number of radio stations in the United States during “the golden era” of broadcasting from 1927 to 1940 years had grown 116 times (Sterling and Kittross, 2001). Today, one of the rarest music formats in Russia is the Easy Listening format, which is partly represented by the Relax FM radio station. In addition to music programs, the Relax FM radio broadcastings include thematic rubrics and short speech programs that make a significant contribution to the overall concept of this radio station. The article discusses the verbal components at the radio station of the Easy Listening format, their functions and features. In order to analyze the speech elements of the studied radio, the methods of observation and content analysis, as well as some other empirical and general scientific methods were used. The results were interpreted on the basis of the percentage of music and speech on the airwaves, as well as the ratio of the average timing of the commercial break, built using verbalics, and the average timing of the thematic category. In addition, the speech analysis of verbal components showed how the difference in the essential approach to speech in the advertising unit and in the thematic rubric affects the general speech discourse of the radio. Thus, the main functions of verbal components on the radio station of the Easy Listening format can definitely be considered to be informational, advertising, recreational and educational functions. The features of speech components are in the field of message semantics, as well as in terms of vocabulary and intonation, aimed at supporting the general concept of broadcasting. A separate speech group consists of advertising messages that are significantly different from the specific mood of the radio, but which, in doing so, are designed to support the very existence of the radio station. These provisions ultimately entail the possibility of new research in the field of linguistics of radio programs, psycholinguistics, and the management of the broadcasting industry.

**Keywords:** Verbal components; radio language; radio station; radio format; Easy Listening.



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### 1. Introduction

The formatting of radio stations in Russia is indirect: the commercialization of radio and, as a result, the choice of pattern of ownership and the form of broadcasting has a significant impact not only on the principles of programming but also on the format of radio. Theorists identify several major formats and their groups, characteristic of radio stations in Russia. The main groups of music formats are Adult Contemporary (AC) and Contemporary Hit Radio (CHR); also on the Russian airwave, informational and communicatory-entertaining radio presented by the radio stations, such as “Ekho Moskvy”, “Mayak”, “Vesti FM”, etc., can be referred into a separate group. Against the general background there stands out the radio station Relax FM, which is not comprehended in any of these groups. It started on April 18, 2006; broadcasting regions are Moscow and the Moscow Region, Kazan, Ufa, Simferopol, Voronezh, Saratov. Initially, the radio station was part of the PMBC holding (Prof-Media Broadcasting Corporation), which in 2014 became part of one of the largest holdings of Russia and Europe, Gazprom-Media Holding (Vartanova, 2017). In 2007, Relax FM radio was recognized as the best radio station in Europe. Its format is defined by radio itself as “soft, melodic music, chillout”; the principles of Relax FM broadcasting on the website of the radio station are described as follows: “it transmits positive emotions”, “soft melodic music”, “escape from the hustle, calm wave”, “only music is on the air, there are no DJs and no news”.

The radio station is patterned after the Music box, which is singled out by some theorists in a separate format. If you define the format as a style of music radio programs designed to satisfy the tastes of a certain target audience, and take into account that the format depends on many factors (music, news, the work of the host air, programs, headings, the image of the radio, equipment of the studio, etc.), it is possible with a certain degree of confidence to refer this unique radio station to the Easy Listening format, which was especially popular in the USA in 1950–70. It is noted in the biographical and album reference book dealing with the conductors and composers of popular orchestral music that in the form in which we understand popular orchestral music now, it has incorporated features of quite different currents of musical forms. In addition to orchestral music, instrumental music, popular music in arrangements in the style of Chillout and Ambient, music in foreign languages are represented at the heart of the programs of this radio. In part, the radio station Relax FM transmits music in the style of New Age (music for stress

relief and meditation), which is also singled out by experts into a separate radio format (Musiker and Musiker, 2014).

Despite the fact that music content is defined as the main (and comes out such), radio stations of such formats are interesting from the point of view of format preservation when the environment is filled with verbalics. Interestingly, back in years 30s of the twentieth century a sociological survey was conducted, which showed that, in general, drama productions were recalled better than musical programs. It is obvious that the total volume of verbal components is not reduced only to thematic and other headings. In modern radio programming, high timekeeping is also allocated for advertising, and here it must be taken into account that any radio advertising is written by Post production departments under the advertiser who determines the type of this advertisement – whether it will be textual, poetic, image, vocal, etc., besides radio stations are often financially dependent on advertising revenues. Advertising information undoubtedly influences the total amount of verbal components on the radio airwaves, along with thematic headings (Webster *et al.*, 2005).

The main principle of programming the Relax FM radio station is the lack of living news and DJs. However, as mentioned above, this does not exclude the inclusion of verbal recorded transmissions in the music non-stop. They are the object of the present study, which, ultimately, is designed to answer the questions – What are the main tasks performed by verbal components on Easy Listening radio stations? Can their appearance within the framework of a given format be considered as a sign of mixed formatting within the format evolution? How does verbalics of advertising messages affect the airwaves?

So, the object of the study is verbal, that is, verbally transmitted speech headings of Relax FM, the elements of program packaging, as well as all text ads that are broadcasted on the radio station (Lule, 2016).

## 2. Methods

The study used theoretical, empirical and general scientific methods. The method of observation and content analysis, which made it possible to follow the speech peculiarities of the verbal components of the radio, became the main methods. By means of these methods, information was collected on the percentage of the use of the verbal components of the radio program in headings and advertising, as well as the ratio of music and conversation on the air.

During the calendar month, the morning, afternoon, and evening hours of the radio broadcast were taken into account, one hour within each daily interval. We have calculated the average time duration of the heading, the average time of the ad unit (including sponsors' advertising messages), which made it possible to calculate the ratio of advertising time and subject headings. In addition, we have calculated what average time per hour is occupied by all verbal components, including jingles in which the spoken text is used.

Methods of comparative analysis, analogies and generalizations helped to assess the specifics of speech presentation in rubrics and advertising, which made it possible to draw conclusions about the correspondence of verbalics to the main Relax FM format. A systematic approach to all presented methods allowed us to suggest to what extent verbal components correct the basic format of a radio station, based on easy listening and programmed according to the principle of the Music box.

## 3. Results

The Relax FM radio station in its running order, according to data from the official website of the radio company <http://relax-fm.ru>, has 18 regular headings, 15 of which are constructed using conversation, i.e. they relate to the verbal components of the radio program. These are the following headings Relax Geography, Relax Element, Relax Life, Relax Single, Relax Near Water, Relax Journey for Beauty, Relax Gourmania, Relax Routes, Relax Replica, Relax Persona, Relax Cinema, Relax Style, Relax Legend, Relax Festive Mood, Relax Weather. The air is supplemented by temporary headings of Relax Festivals that are not listed on the site. In addition to these headings, the present study involves the elements of Post production – vocal advertising and jingles, since they include phrases built in the style of a general format. On average, the hourly segment of the daytime air of the Relax FM contains 3-4 advertising blocks of 2-3 commercials in each, in addition, some headings have a sponsor (for example, the heading “Weather forecast”). Text advertising prevails on radio stations and, to a certain extent, is able “to compete” for the listener within airtime. According to our calculations, the average time for one ad unit on Relax FM radio is 38 seconds, including sponsors' commercials; average time for one thematic title is 58 seconds.

Concerning the inclusion of thematic headings, ad units, sponsorship, jingles per hour of airtime, here we have obtained the following results: the average time of headings and jingles (that is, the format elements of the radio program) – 3,2 minutes per hour; average advertising time, including sponsorship – 4,35 minutes per hour. The average time of all vocal programs in relation to music was 7,55 minutes per hour, music, respectively, sounds 52,45 minutes per hour. In percentage terms, it looks like this: 1) conversation is 14,4% of the total time of the one-hour broadcast; 2) 6,1% of the received “speech” time is occupied by headings and jingles; 3) 8,3% of all verbal inclusions per hour is given to advertising (Kiriya and Novikova, 2017).

## 4. Discussion

Research conclusions have been made taking into account the science-based position that the concepts of text and discourse are applied to whole works. Text is, as a rule, a formal plan, or a plan of expression, and discourse is the meaning of the text, that is, the plan of its content on the whole. This is how the line is drawn between what the base language means and what our consciousness attributes to it Katz *et al.* (2017). The main part of the thematic

Relax FM headings encompasses those areas of life that contribute to relaxation, rest, contemplation – this is the main task of the entire radio environment, transmitted both on the site and from the radio set. The program policy of verbal components, as a whole, corresponds to the format of Easy Listening. The description of the headings on the official website of the radio company also corresponds to the speech with which each of these headings is filled. For example, the Relax Gurmania on the site is announced as follows: “There are people who sincerely believe that the last and highest gift from the gods to man is a sense of proportion. But what about the sense of taste? To know the taste of life without having loss of appetite is truly great art. Join us!” Vocabulary in one of the airings is about Italian bruschetta: “for certain”, “aroma”, “original”, “not forbidden”, etc. The style of speech in this category is journalistic with the elements of literary, the vocabulary supports the basic idea, the text is pronounced with the original intonation – speaking in a soft drawl, intonation of full stop, long pauses, reading with a half-smile.

As can be seen from the results of the study, not all categories in the program of radio station are constant. For example, in July 2018, the Relax Festivals heading was put on the air, which was not listed on the main site. Speech in this category stylistically stands out against the general background of the headings, as it is based on the constructions being characteristic of information broadcasting: “organizing committee”, “improve skills”, “casting director”, “eminent masters”, “premiere”, “mission – the development and popularization” and so on. Thus, the basis of the stylistic construction of the category consists of speech patterns, abbreviations, clericalism, borrowings. Despite the general “news” orientation of the rubric, the intonation of the narrator does not violate the general format audio streaming of the air. Relax Festivals most often announce the event or inform about the holding of events. Thematically, the category also fully corresponds to the main air – it reports on major events in the field of culture and art, for example, the opera festival. Thus, the Relax Festivals heading performs several tasks: informs, educates, entertains; the functions are performed via the intonation and the vocabulary and stylistics of the text. The information function is, in this case, in the foreground. In this respect, one permanent category, Relax Weather, is similar to temporary categories.

A special function is performed by the radio jingles. They not only help to maintain the general mood of the air but also divide the program wheel into segments, and lexically harmonizing with the programs and categories of the radio station. For example, one of the programs of the Relax Cafe is announced by a jingle - “tasty music for pleasant meetings”. Semantically, the jingle binds the radio broadcast to the real life of the each single person, thus detailing the personal space of the broadcast listener. One can say that the jingles of the radio station, as well as the entire musical package of the Relax FM, are mounted with regard to the effect of priming. It implies that under the influence of media the recipients form the associations related to media content that was perceived by the recipients. The examples of such jingles are: “movement without fuss”, “it is easy to listen – it is easier to live”, “not to be in a hurry and have everything in time”, etc. In the end, we can assume that the entire radio program is based on this effect. The studies by Alan Collins and Elizabeth Loftus suggest that thoughts activated by priming, in turn, activate other semantically associated thoughts. Thus, it is supposed that the listener will achieve that state of calm which is positioned by the main goal of the radio station and supported by its format (Collins and Loftus, 1975).

Finally, verbalics of commercial spots plays its role in forming the general speech content of the air. In our opinion, when studying the speech components of a radio program, it is necessary to take into account the advertising text, since it occupies a considerable fraction of the verbal part of the air. This is confirmed by the results of the study: the timing of the average ad unit in relation to the timing of the average thematic heading is two-thirds, which is more than a half. The verbal elements of advertising are completely different: the vocabulary corresponds to the theme and the subject of the commercial, it can be rich in numerals, which overloads the text, each commercial is intonationally separated. All these features distinguish advertising from the general music and conversation streaming but are true for themselves, because they are meant to perform the only main function – advertising.

## 5. Conclusions

1. Constant thematic headings and jingles, as the basic elements of a radio station package, are meant to support the overall concept of the Relax FM radio station. Their main functions are informational, recreational, educational. The peculiar features of such headings, definitely, can be considered the lexical composition, intonation picture of speech, timbre coloring of voices of presenters, subject and general stylistics of the text. As described above, the main part of the thematic Relax FM headings covers those areas of life that stimulate relaxation, rest, contemplation.

2. Temporary thematic headings, first of all, perform the information announcing function and are timed to coincide with some upcoming event of the cultural life of the society. The peculiarity of speech in these categories consists in the fact that, based on the general intonation of “rest”, “relaxation”, “peace”, the text in them tends towards informing, forming a positive image of the event, the lexical composition also changes – stock phrases, clericals, set expressions are included – that is, the elements being more characteristic of news programs.

3. Significant role in the formation of verbalics the broadcasting station is played by advertising blocks and commercials of sponsors. This is due, primarily, to the overall timing of advertising on the air. And, if the average advertising unit is one-third less than the average thematic heading, then on the airtime scale, the percentage of time occupied by advertising is higher than the percentage of time taken by headings and jingles (8,3% vs. 6,1%). The main feature of verbalics of the commercial break is that it fully submits to the subject of advertising and performs the advertising function that is main for itself.

4. And finally, a conclusion that can link the present study with further developments on this topic. All verbal elements of the Relax FM broadcasting, as well as radio stations that mainly broadcast in the Easy Listening format total 14,4% per hour. The rest of the time is the music to be put on the air. In this connection, the question arises as

to the retention of the format: is the ratio of speech and music on the air for radio stations of this format optimal?; Do speech elements affect the Easy Listening format?, If they do, to what extent?; Does the tendency impact on increasing speech programs to retain and to extend the format, to transform it, or does it lead to leveling of this type of broadcasting on the Russian broadcasting? The answers to these and many other questions can deepen the theoretical knowledge of modern radio and strengthen the position of broadcasting in relation to other media.

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