

## Epistolary journalism in the modern media space

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### Abstract

This article discusses the epistolary genre in modern journalism in media. It gives the definition of the presence and role of the epistolary genre in modern media space, as well as its genre and infrastructural characteristic. It also presents a ratio of changing volume of private letters to the journalistic epistolary in the historical development of the epistolary genre. Research was based on relevant examples of printed and electronic media of three countries – Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan in 2010-2015. The paper provides the typology and systematization of epistolary journalism examples in modern print media in Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus in 2010-2015. It considers the peculiarities of the epistolary journalism in conjunction with the nature of the publication – general interest, popular science or entertainment. It also identifies common trends in the development of epistolary journalism in the modern media, characterizes the trends of changing the nature of epistolary journalism according to the characteristics of modern media space and means of communication. The typology of the epistolary genre and its sub-genres distinguishes the following letter types: by recipient, content, genre, form.

**Keywords:** Epistolary form, Epistolary genre, Epistolary journalism, Letter, Mass media, Media space

### Introduction

Modern media are characterized by spatial expansion and qualitative characteristics, as well as the unification and universalization of means of communication, creating a so-called media space. The role and importance of printed media is gradually leveled, while the value and impact of new media, ensuring the creation of an integrated media environment, conversely, is growing.

One means of reporting mass information as the representation of dialogical communication between two individuals is a genre of epistolary journalism, adjusted to the fact that communication in the genre of epistolary journalism is, firstly, indirect, secondly, addressed, as a rule, to the mass consciousness, or, on the contrary, is the expression of public opinion (Yellin, 1980). In any case, the means of mass communication and media space is used as a tool for the implementation of this kind of non-personal delayed dialogue.

The controversial issues related to the theory of correspondence are focused on the problem of determining the theoretical status of a letter, its belonging to a certain type of semantic speech means of modern communication. Some scientists (Bhatia, 1993) believe that the nature and specifics of a letter are defined by its belonging to a particular functional style of speech.

The phenomenology of epistolary journalism has been studied for a long time (Yellin, 1980; Ketsba, 1971). Many researchers have considered the genre and stylistic features of epistolary journalism, as well as the question of functionality and compositional features of the epistolary genre (Kurianovich, 2013). Special attention is paid to the dialogic epistolary genre, as well as the specifics of lexical-semantic structure, which makes it possible to structure the entire volume of letters according to casual or emotional reasons (Altman, 1982; Nurmi, 2010). The research also gives some information about epistolary mythopoetics (Yellin, 1980).

While epistolary genre has existed since ancient times, the epistolary journalism emerged as its support, but probably only in the beginning of the Renaissance it has acquired its meaningful development (Randall, 2000). Currently, the epistolary genre in writing, according to many researchers, is reduced almost entirely by transforming into an electronic form, and has acquired its own characteristics, related to the nature of the communication means (Nevala and Palander-collin 2005).

Modern media are developing at an exponential rate – there are new channels of non-personal communications, new technological solutions, new space for communication between people, both in the immediate and delayed dialogue. Accordingly, the epistolary journalism as a genre is exposed to inevitable deformation and transformation in the modern media space and media communication (Simon, 2002).

Epistolary journalism in the modern information environment has unique interactive resources, and can also serve as a means of mass communication when sending a message to the media through a variety of ways, such as using traditional media and using Internet resources. This is a vast field of study and systematization in order to the practical use in journalism further on.

However, a careful review and analysis of research papers (Pavlic, 2013; Riecke and Schuster 2001; Ketsba, 1971) showed that researchers do not devote their attention, firstly, the issue of the integration of the epistolary genre in journalism and giving epistolary a journalistic nature. Epistolary journalism has evolved as one of the sub-genres of journalism not immediately, but it gained its degree of influence in the media space while emerging. There are also no works analyzing the form – lexico-semantic features, classified by subject – but the aspect and impact on the final destination of the published letters. Nor is there an answer to the question of the existence of epistolary journalism in media space of modern media and the currently existing MCT.

Thus, the purpose of the study is to determine the presence and role of the epistolary genre in the modern media space, as well as its genre and infrastructural characteristics.

To achieve this purpose, it is planned to perform the following tasks:

- to describe, on the functional basis, the key characteristics of epistolary journalism in modern printed media in Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus in 2009-2014;
- to analyze the peculiarities of epistolary journalism in conjunction with the nature of the publication – general interest, popular science or entertainment;
- to identify common trends in the development of epistolary journalism in the modern media.

### **Methods**

Research was based on relevant examples of printed and electronic media as a reflection of two points of development of mass communication channels – analog (printed) and electronic (Internet) in three countries – Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, and analyzes the availability, typology and content of epistolary journalism in 2010-2015. The research was based on the following publications:

- In Russia – as a general interest publication – “Rossiyskaya Gazeta” (printed and electronic versions), as a popular science publication – “Science and Life” journal (printed and electronic versions), as an entertainment publication – “Esquire” magazine (printed and electronic versions).

- In Belarus – as a general interest – “Sovetskaya Belorussia” newspaper (printed and electronic versions), as a popular science publication – “ARCHE Pachatak” magazine (printed and electronic versions), as an entertainment publication – “Women’s Magazine” (printed and electronic versions).

In Kazakhstan – as a general interest publication: “Gazeta.kz” portal (electronic version), as a popular science publication – “Continent” magazine (printed and electronic versions), as an entertainment publication – “Forbes Magazine Kazakhstan” (printed and electronic versions).

The methodology of the study included the content analysis of the described materials. The main scientific load of this method – diagnostic function – based on a systematic analysis of the use of the epistolary genre in publications “Rossiyskaya Gazeta”, “Science and Life”, “Esquire”, “Sovetskaya Belorussia”, “ARCHE Pachatak”, “Women’s Magazine”, “Gazeta .kz”, “Continent”, “Forbes Kazakhstan” to reconstruct an overall picture of functioning of epistolary journalism in the modern media space.

## Results

In terms of form, as a result of the analysis of epistolary journalism, the authors revealed the fact that the entire epistolary genre can be divided into three branches:

- real letter – a letter that one person writes to another in the context of personal, business, scientific and any other correspondence;
- epistolary journalism – letters, originally intended for publication and addressed, as a rule, to either general public, or a particular destination, but with an impact on a wide range of destinations;
- epistolography – the use of a letter form for organizing literary works (novels in letters).

Despite this division into three branches, the whole epistolary genre has its own specific genre features:

1. Letter dialogueness. To whatever branch of the epistolary genre does a letter belong to, certainly its structure will contain a reference to the addressee. In journalistic writing destination can be conditional (Vladimir Monomakh’s letter to children – recipients are a wide range of children), concretely shared (the reference to a politician, thinker, scientist), designed to familiarize a wide range of letter readers with its basic postulates, written to particular destination, as well as a sender can be specific (someone refers to someone or to general public through a letter) or abstract. For example, an open letter from the general public to a particular politician or a general open letter addressed to general public as the target audience.

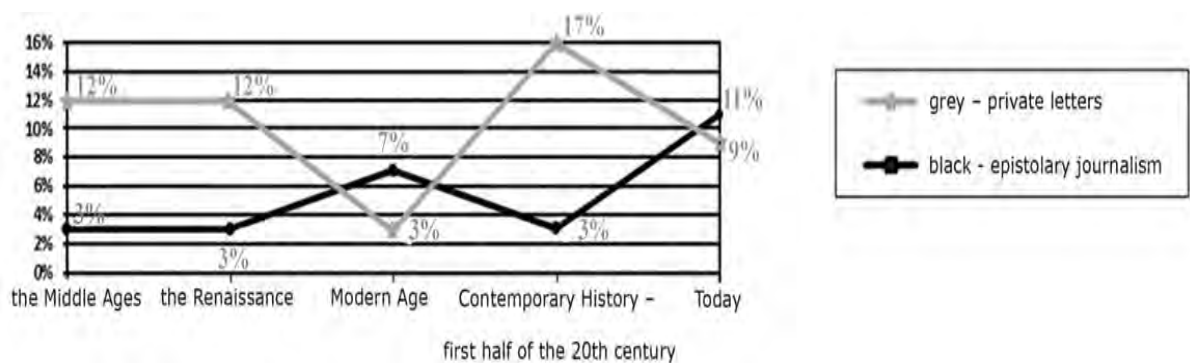
2. The nature of the delayed dialogue – apart from letter dialogueness characteristics, we can say that the text of the letter is always stylistically built as if dialogue takes place between two interlocutors, specific or abstract – does not really matter. We can say that the writer is always trying to really build their speech as if he was addressing an oral monologue to a real interlocutor.

3. Narrating in the singular. This rule is not obligatory, as open letters might also mean multiple handling. But at the same time it is certainly present in various components in the text communication component construction. So letters always have a tone of dialogue intimacy, as a letter is always addressed by an author to the destination, concrete or abstract.

4. Framework design. Regardless of the subgenre, epistolary letter is bound to have an address, introductory phrases, representing the letter author(s) and addressing the recipient (complimentary part), always has the final piece and signature.

5. Regardless of the sub-genre, letters always have a multi-style epistolary nature. As already mentioned, letter is a versatile tool for presenting information of different styles, stylistic nuances of which will largely depend on what purpose the text has – whether it has a social perspective, personal, business or a scientific shade.

Volume and structure of the epistolary genre have increased over time. (Kachkaeva, 2010). If we consider the evolution of epistolary journalism in conjunction with private epistolary, it is possible to schematically depict the process as (Figure 1):



**Figure 1: Nominal ratio of private letters volume change to journalistic epistolary in the historical development of the epistolary genre**

In the typology of the epistolary genre and its subgenre – epistolary journalism – we highlighted the following types of letters for the following reasons: by the destination (addressed, unaddressed, letter to the editor), content (business, scientific, social, political, personal), by genre (artistic, scientific, business, and everyday conversational, multi-style), by form (present and epistolographical). Based on this we conducted a content analysis of samples of epistolary journalism in the printed and electronic media in Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan over the past 5 years.

The following trends can be seen in the analysis and typology of epistolary journalism in the media in Russia: total epistolary journalism in the Russian newspaper does not exceed 7% of the total volume of the publication; according to the destination most of the letters are addressed (65% of all are emails, 25% - letters to the editor, 10% - unaddressed); 75% of the publications, made in the epistolary genre are open letters of scientific, socio-political or business content and style, 20% - multi-styled personal letters addressed to editors or published as historical documents, 5% - works made in an epistolographical form.

Similarly, the total amount of epistolary journalism in the “Science and Life” magazine does not exceed 11% of the total volume of publications, most of the letters are addressed (70% of all are emails, 30% - letters to the editor, no unaddressed letters), 80% of the publications, performed in the epistolary genre, are open letters of scientific, socio-political or business content and style, 20% - multi-style personal letters, addressed to the editors or published as a historical document..

Similarly, the total amount of epistolary journalism in the “Esquire” magazine does not exceed 3% of the total volume of publications, most of the letters are addressed to the editorial office (70% - letters to the editor, 30% - other destinations, no unaddressed letters), 40% of the publications, performed in the epistolary genre, are open letters of socio-political content and style,

60% - multi-style personal letters addressed to editors or published as a historical document. No epistolographical works. Thus, the entertainment publication revealed its orienteering on communication of readers and editors and the focus on personal and social issues.

The analysis and typology of epistolary journalism in Kazakh media over the past 5 years showed the following trends: the total amount of epistolary journalism in “Gazeta.kz” does not exceed 3% of the total amount of information on the portal, most of the letters are addressed (85% of all are emails, 10% - letters to the editor, 5% - unaddressed), 80% of the publications, made in the epistolary genre, are open letters of scientific, socio-political or business content and style, 10% - multi-style personal letters, addressed to the editors or published as a historical document, 10% - epistolographical works.

Similarly, the total amount of epistolary journalism in the “Continent” magazine does not exceed 2% of the total volume of the publication, most of the letters are addressed (100% of all the letters), 80% of the publications, made in the epistolary genre, are open letters of scientific, socio-political or business content and style, 20% - multi-style personal letters, published as a historical document. No epistolographical works.

Similarly, the total amount of epistolary journalism in the “Forbes Kazakhstan” magazine does not exceed 12% of the total volume of the publication, most of the letters are addressed (80% - emails, 20% - letters to the editor), 87% of the publications, made in the epistolary genre, are open letters of scientific, socio-political or business content and style, 13% - multi-style personal letters, published as a historical document. No epistolographical works.

The analysis and typology of epistolary journalism in the media in Belarus over the past 5 years showed the following trends: the total amount of epistolary journalism in the “Sovetskaya Belorussia” newspaper does not exceed 2% of the total volume of the publication, most of the letters are addressed (80% - emails, 10% - letters to the editor, 10% - unaddressed), 70% of the publications, made in the epistolary genre, are open letters of scientific, socio-political or business content and style, 10% - multi-style personal letters addressed to editors or published as historical documents, 20% - epistolographical works.

Similarly, the total amount of epistolary journalism in the “ARCHE Pachatak” magazine does not exceed 3% of the total volume of the publication, most of the letters are addressed (90% - emails, 10% - letters to the editor), 95% of the publications, made in the epistolary genre, are open letters of scientific, socio-political or business content and style, 5% - multi-style personal letters, published as a historical document. No epistolographical works.

Similarly, the total amount of epistolary journalism in the “Women’s Magazine” does not exceed 8% of the total volume of publications, most of the letters are addressed (80% - emails, 20% - letters to the editor), 60% of the publications, made in the epistolary genre, are open letters of scientific, socio-political or business content and style, 5% - multi-style personal letters, published as a historical document, 35% - epistolographical works.

If we arrange the data, we get the picture given in Table 1:

**Table 1: Content analysis of samples of epistolary journalism in printed and electronic media in Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan in 2010-2015**

Characteristics		Russian media	Kazakh media	Belorussian media
The amount of epistolary journalism	General interest	7% of the total amount	3% of the total amount	2% of the total amount
	Popular science	11% of the total amount	3% of the total amount	3% of the total amount
According to address	General interest	65% addressed letters, 25% - letters to editors, 10% - unaddressed	85% addressed letters, 10% - letters to editors, 5% - unaddressed	80% addressed letters, 10% - letters to editors, 10% - unaddressed
	Popular science	70% addressed letters, 30% - letters to editors	100% addressed letters	90% addressed letters, 10% - letters to editors
	Entertainment	70% - letters to editors, 30% addressed letters	80% addressed letters, 20% - letters to editors	80% addressed letters, 20% - letters to editors
According to style	General interest	75% open letters of scientific, socio-political or business content and style 20% - multi-style personal letters addressed to editors or published as historical documents, 5% - epistolographical works	80% open letters of scientific, socio-political or business content and style 10% - multi-style personal letters addressed to editors or published as historical documents, 10% - epistolographical works	70% open letters of scientific, socio-political or business content and style 10% - multi-style personal letters addressed to editors or published as historical documents, 20% - epistolographic. works
	Popular science	80% open letters of scientific, socio-political or business content and style 20% - multi-style personal letters addressed to editors or published as historical documents, No epistolographical works	80% open letters of scientific, socio-political or business content and style 20% - multi-style personal letters addressed to editors or published as historical documents, No epistolographical works	95% open letters of scientific, socio-political or business content and style 5% - multi-style personal letters addressed to editors or published as historical documents, No epistolographic. works
	Entertainment	40% open letters of scientific, socio-political or business content and style 60% - multi-style personal letters addressed to editors or published as historical documents, No epistolographical works	87% open letters of scientific, socio-political or business content and style 13% - multi-style personal letters addressed to editors or published as historical documents, No epistolographical works	60% open letters of scientific, socio-political or business content and style 5% - multi-style personal letters addressed to editors or published as historical documents, 35% - epistolographical works

## Discussion

Modern information space not only enables people to communicate with each other via emails as delayed dialogue, if one cannot communicate directly, but also provides an opportunity to communicate with the media visualization and communication process design. The conditions for the occurrence of the mass media, represented in fiction, the emergence of the first means of mass communication, and then their development, cause the desire to develop as epistolary genre (Randall, 2000).

This fact, in our opinion, has changed epistolary journalism beyond recognition, which many researchers are now consider obsolete in the traditional sense of a paper letter (Zassoursky, 2005; Kabanova, 2004; Kamneva, 2015).

In determining the epistolary genre, the study mentioned that the separation of the epistolary genre as an independent literary style is necessary, as the epistolary genre has its own specific style features, the main among them is the nature of the delayed dialogue (Tertychnyi, 2014).

The authors of other studies do not agree with this opinion and, summarizing these theoretical attempts, there are three main approaches to the understanding of the specifics of a letter. Proponents of the first explain it as a sort of specific functional style; proponents of the second agree that it originates from the concept of speech genres; proponents of the third consider letter to be sort of a type (genre) of a text.

Other studies confirm that the epistolary style cannot exist apart from the scientific, business or conversational style, as in its stylistic features it is capable of harmoniously combining elements of all the above mentioned speech styles (Bhatia, 1993).

Scientists investigating epistolary from the point of linguistics, usually either deny the existence of the epistolary genre as such (Kurianovich, 2014), pointing out that the letter genre does not exist, there are only different groups of letters which should be considered separately, or consider that the specifics of the epistolary genre make a special epistolary style (Benstock, 1985).

It is preferred to combine the data of both points of view, and accept the existence of the epistolary genre as syncretic from the stylistic point of view of a tool of presenting information of different styles, wrapped in a letter genre with all its features of epistolary genre. A letter can be considered in the context of psychological analysis, historical analysis, literary analysis, linguistic analysis, sociological and anthropological analysis, etc. In this study, a letter is seen through the prism of journalistic analysis.

The significance of the study lies in the implementation of a comprehensive analysis of the peculiarities of the epistolary journalism in periodicals of different thematic areas in the context of time requirements, which is a new object of analysis in the world of science.

Identifying the specific properties of Russian, Belarusian and Kazakh media in a comparative context would make a certain contribution to the further development of the epistolary genre theory, which, depending on its historical development, acquired in addition to the general points, peculiar only to it, some historical features. The analysis of invariant and variant features and typological characteristics of the media structure of epistolary texts construction contributed to the development of a coherent scientific picture of the functioning problems of this genre in the media space.

The study confirmed the scientific concept of the existence of epistolary phenomenon in the media, developed in scientific studios (Bolotnov, 2014; Bolotnova, 2015; Tertychnyi, 2014). Still, the study significantly expanded the description of the functional characteristics of epistolary texts, refilled scientific turnover of new media materials, which were not subjects of special investigations. Therefore, conclusions of the article make it possible to take a fresh look at the epistolary genre in

the context of journalism, as well as a deeper understanding of the nature of social and emotional relationship of modern humans.

### **Conclusion**

The understanding of contemporary society as a society living in an electronic and printed epistolary space, makes it possible to better understand the form of epistolary genre of journalism.

Semantics and stylistics of the modern epistolary, as well as gradually spreading not only in everyday and electronic, but also printing format, iconization, symbolism and the use of abbreviations and “memes” affects the decoding of the information contained in the modern epistolary genre.

The effectiveness of epistolary journalism content is directly dependent on the modern media communication channel through which it was presented, as well as its style, content, design, publicist individuality, channel MCT popularity and other factors.

Comparative characteristics of media publications in Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan showed that epistolary journalism now has a place in today’s media, with the majority of samples of epistolary journalism are addressed, open, of the scientific, socio-political or business content and style, rarely – multi-style personal letters (often in the entertainment editions).

Defining the future directions and prospects for expanding researches, we should focus more on the understanding of the nature of the epistolary genre functioning as a dialogue with readers based on specific texts; particularly interesting is the comparative characteristic of letters placement priority in the general system of media materials of different thematic areas, national affection, etc. It is recommended to expand the amount of media material for analysis.

Epistolary in the modern information environment, taking into account the described trends, is a rather telegraph-laconic-style artifact of a journalistic text.

An interesting fact is that evolution makes another turn of the spiral– humanity, which began the development of writing with pictograms and symbolizing, now comes to the same – the Internet is full of symbols, which are included in the emotional subtexts of epistolary messages. That is why modern epistolary is difficult to call “a letter”. A letter has a well-defined structure, including handling, preface, etiquette units, conclusion, farewell addressing, signature and other elements, and the modern epistolary message can address only one or another person / group of people. The symbolization of emotional and lyrical component of epistolary genre in the modern information environment is increasingly presented not by expressive language means, but emoticons – in order to save space and ease the expressing of emotions.

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The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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