

Diversity in Unity: Communication Strategies and Target Reader in Three Women's Magazines

Renáta Tomášková

Abstract

*Drawing upon the methodology of mass media text analysis suggested by Fairclough, the study offers an insight into the divergences and convergences in the discourse of women's magazines. Even though the magazines discussed apparently differ in target audience (with regard to age, social status, professional or family role), the distinguishing features generally do not exceed a unifying, constant frame based on providing advice, building a women's world with men marginalized or excluded, and largely employing the linguistic features of advertising discourse. The communication strategies range from a very informal, conversationalised approach in *Cosmopolitan*, through a more respectful attitude in *Harper's Bazaar*, to a patronizing support in *Fit Pregnancy: Mom & Baby*.*

Keywords: communication strategy; critical discourse analysis; female magazines; stylistics; personalization; conversationalisation

This article is part of the Czech Science Foundation (GA ČR) grant-funded project number 405/07/0176, *Communication and Textual Strategies in Mass Media, Commercial and Academic Discourse (A Contrastive Analysis of English and Czech Discourse)*.

Introduction

The present study aims to draw attention to the inner convergences and divergences in the discourse of women's magazines, which may outwardly create an impression of an undifferentiated mass of female reading. It focuses on three representatives of this numerous set, namely *Cosmopolitan*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Fit Pregnancy: Mom & Baby*, attempting to suggest through discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis the ways in which each of the magazines constructs its reader, how these prospective readers differ, and how their expected characteristics determine the topics, presuppositions, genres, and linguistic features of the texts.

The methodological background and the scope of the study

The methodology of the study is based on Norman Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995a), drawing upon the framework and terminology he proposed for media text analysis. With each of the three titles involved, the following discussion intends to provide an insight into the topics forming the content of the magazine, the discourses, genres and voices employed, and the linguistic representation of the content, distinguishing the foregrounded and backgrounded phenomena and key communication strategies.

Even though I fully accept the fact that such an analysis "needs to be multisemiotic [...] including analysis of photographic images, layout and the overall visual organization of the pages" (Fairclough, 1995a, 58), this study only occasionally comments on the visual side without thorough coverage of its full complexity. The visual impact of lifestyle magazines is far too various and self-contained to be considered as merely complementary to text; fulfilling its own goals and strategies it presents material for a separate discussion (as in Benwell's study concentrating on the visual aspects of men's magazines, Benwell, 2002).

COSMOPOLITAN: I never wanted to feel helpless again Topics: presence and absence, foregrounding and backgrounding

Cosmopolitan is a very general lifestyle magazine for women. Rather than inclining to any kind of specific professional or pastime interests, it accompanies the woman reader on her way through her day-to-day pleasures and struggles: daily routines and care for her appearance, loss and building of her confidence, eating habits, shopping for fashion, health problems, seasonal tasks such as e.g. summer preparations for holidays and sunbathing, etc., yet first and foremost relationships.

No matter how often the reader is reminded of her qualities and of the care and attention she deserves (even though mainly from herself, as illustrated by the following headline *Give yourself a big tick! Some days you need to remind yourself you're much more fabulous than you think*), the success in finding the One or being happy single, which means in fact having fun in a series of flirtations, still remains the principal goal and motivation that gives sense to all the rest. Many of the topics appear recurrently with slight alterations and in different contexts, not only in subsequent issues but also within one issue of the magazine.

An essential part is played by celebrities who inspire regular gossip columns as well as feature articles; the way they reveal their life experiences, however, seems to be highly controlled. In accordance with the omnipresent focus on love and relationships, they contribute their own successes and failures in partnerships, friendships or family relations, while professional careers, education, and other interests remain untouched or marginalized (the situation is well illustrated by the following headlines, e.g. *I've Been An Idiot With Men, I'm Proud To Have Gwyneth & Drew As Friends!*).

As the absence of certain topics may be as eloquent as the presence of others, it should also be noted which aspects of everyday life are missing or marginalized. As Fowler explains: "Actually, it makes sense to differentiate degrees of presence, as it were, rather than just contrasting what is present and what is absent" (Fairclough 1995a, 106) and consequently he proposes a scale ranging from absent and presupposed to backgrounded and foregrounded.

Cosmopolitan clearly ignores all kinds of household chores, not even including advertisements for detergents or washing powders; cooking is briefly mentioned only in connection with slimming and healthy diets. Another backgrounded topic is child-rearing or parenthood, which is reduced to unwanted pregnancies seen as feared obstacles in spite of which women can still enjoy life. Providing help or taking care of others – be it a child, relative, neighbour or pet – is hardly to be found among the topics. They might not fit in the overwhelming atmosphere of *getting more from life*, the life of entertainment and carefree joy in which the readers should not *miss out on all the fun*.

As was already noted above in connection with celebrity-related themes, professional careers or jobs in general do not function as a topic for discussion. Though not absent and often even given graphic prominence in the text, their presence could be interpreted as a false clue: rather than attracting attention by themselves they are used in the employ of other aims. In articles presenting common people's experiences or habits, the professions are regularly included together with their names, ages and places of living, which effectively supports the mass media tendency towards personalization, and at the same time builds a picture of a seriously handled survey. In confession-like texts, a career occasionally serves as one of the possible ways leading to the development of a woman's individuality (e.g. in contrast to pregnancy and childcare) and to her independence (e.g. as opposed to being dependent on her husband/partner).

The role of presuppositions

Fairclough's scale of presence and absence, though, should not be given only a prima facie interpretation; in other words, degrees of presence may not always correspond with the degrees of importance or informative prominence which the topic or fact has in the text. Thus in lifestyle magazines (similarly to advertising), what is presupposed is actually the matter of principal importance, legitimizing the topics selected, enabling the magazine to become meaningful for their readers.

I have in mind presuppositions implied by headlines, sub-headlines and often also introductory paragraphs. Formed as questions or assertions with the simple present tense indicating their general validity, they refer to common experience with which the readers are assumed to be familiar and to opinions assumed to be shared. The strategy supports the desired bonding between the readers and their magazine, in this case within the COSMO community.

The following examples show that the presuppositions mostly draw upon traditional social and gender stereotypes:

Are girlfriends the new boyfriends?

You love them, honour them and no one can come between you. These days, while men come and go, it's our friends who are our life partners, says Erin Kelly (Cosmo 2006, 93).

It's not just women who are neurotic about their bodies. (Cosmo 2007, 86).

"Why that little blue line doesn't mean it's all over"

Cosmo spoke to three inspiring women who have proved that becoming a single mum doesn't mean you can't have the career and life you've always dreamt of...

What happens when pregnancy isn't at the top of your to-do list but you suddenly discover you've missed a period? If you decide to keep the baby, there's your single-girl flat, the not-sure-he's-for-life bloke and overdraft to consider when fitting a child into your life. (Cosmo 2007, 122).

A note on genres and text types

The topics are shaped into a limited set of genres, dominated by confessions, interviews, instructions, and advertisements. The set could be enriched with narratives, but here this genre (sometimes interpreted as a 'pre-genre', Swales, 1990 in Fairclough, 1995a) has a specific position and realization; it never appears in a 'pure' form, though on the other hand it is pervasive. 'Stories' find their place in each of the forms listed above. Fuzzy borders between genres and their fading into one another result in a dynamic variability of the inner structure of texts, which is a vital quality compensating for the repetitive and stereotypical nature of the content.

The genre description is further complicated by the patchwork-like realizations of the texts: main-stream texts are regularly interrupted by embedded passages of the same or different genres, and by references to web pages; main-stream texts can be also limited to one or two lead-in paragraphs followed by a text colony (for a definition of text colony as a text type see Hoey, 1986; for the colony structure of lifestyle magazines see Tomášková, 2008). With substantial support from the visual effects, the pages of *Cosmopolitan* glut the reader with a motley of texts, genres, colourful graphic creations, pictures and photos, which as a whole has a distracting effect, almost preventing accurate and concentrated reading. This composition, however, is not to the detriment of coherence or readability; rather than being a drawback it is perceived as a significant stylistic feature which is balanced with low information density and repetitiveness.

Confessions take a variety of shapes, explicit in specialized columns and implicit in many others. Their main aim consists in opening the confessor's heart to Cosmo: celebrities, ordinary people (almost exclusively women), and the women writers themselves confide their personal experiences, often accidents or failures, with an emphasis on difficult, embarrassing or even humiliating moments. Whereas in shorter forms (letters) the story ends at its worst point, in longer (feature) articles the desperate situation finally unravels and everything takes a turn for the better.

The specialized columns (*COSMO confessions*, *COSMO confesses*) quote short extracts from personal letters (15 to 20 narrow column lines on average) providing very blunt and simple narrations of usually sexually charged events of grotesque character; feature articles, although also based on personal confessions, offer more serious topics, namely examples of women who have coped with a critical point in their lives, e.g. a serious health problem, her partner's death, or unwanted pregnancy and single parenthood.

But no matter what particular shape the confession finally acquires, the focus is always on sharing; rather than bringing information about a personal problem or describing a difficult situation, confessions are here to arouse emotions, mostly compassion, pity, sympathy and solidarity. As the protagonists of the stories are exclusively women, the confessions are constitutive of a female community, constructing the community of COSMO readers.

The attractiveness of confessions and their ability to arouse emotions, I would argue, do not consist primarily in the topics selected (they are repetitive and seldom bring anything new or extraordinary) but in the communication strategy employed. Step by step the reader is led to her identification with the problem discussed through its personalization, emphasis on the general relevance of the issue, and the conversationalisation of the language. An indispensable part is also played by photographs, carefully selected and arranged to support the factual as well as the emotional message of the text.

The position of men in *Cosmopolitan* magazine

Although they seem to be the essential motivation and the ultimate target of women's desires and actions, in the *Cosmopolitan* texts men are actually put in the shade, giving space to women's impressions, opinions and attitudes. Anything related to men is presented through women's eyes. Men are rarely really integrated into COSMO women's lives; they serve as the personalization of their dreams or disappointments, as objects to be gained, explored and admired as well as feared – and, perhaps for that reason, also often ridiculed.

This point could be illustrated by two interviews with male celebrities published in one issue of *Cosmopolitan* (Cosmo 2007). Both characterize the celebrity in a form resembling a personal advertisement:

Justin Timberlake tells Cosmo how he's moved on but still has room for one woman in his life...and two dogs (Cosmo 2007, 79).

Luke Wilson is as perplexed as the rest of us as to why he isn't married yet. The 36-year-old actor and younger brother of Owen is clearly husband material – tall, dark, handsome, funny and, coming from Dallas, he has that sexy Texan drawl (Cosmo 2007, 121).

Both include and highlight a tender spot in their lives (Timberlake was bullied as a child and his twin sister died shortly after birth; Wilson had to overcome sibling rivalry), both interviewees see in the male interviewee an opportunity to find out more about women rather than men:

What did your mum tell you about girls?

“That they change like the seasons. Actually, that they change like the positions in a football game – that’s better than seasons!” (Cosmo 2007, 79).
So what qualities does Luke look for in his soulmate? “I find forgiveness attractive,” he laughs.
“Honestly, I like someone who is easy-going, intelligent, attractive. And they don’t have to be in the business.” (Cosmo 2007, 121).

These brief and sketchy notes on the position of men in this female magazine should show that the omnipresence of men in *Cosmopolitan* does not interfere with the cohesiveness and relative closeness of the female community constructed here as hunting for men and trying to gain the upper hand over them.

Communication strategies: personalization and conversationalisation

Personalization is a dominant trend in contemporary mass media in general (Fairclough, 1995a). On the one hand, the problems introduced are never impersonal, they are always related to a specific person; on the other hand, though, the characterization of the person’s identity is superficial and vague enough not to overshadow the main point – the issue under discussion, e.g. *I graduated from university in June 2005, celebrated my 21st birthday in August and then started my new job as a travel consultant. My social life had really taken off. Everything was just beginning* (Cosmo 2007, 41). The personality – of negligible importance in itself – introduces a sense of authenticity, and mirroring the personal data of the prospective readers (age of 20 to 35, practical education and job, single, enjoying socializing, travel, and fashion), calls for readers’ emotional investment.

A possible danger of detachment – which the readers may feel if the stories were presented as purely personal – is prevented by the use of pronouns or nouns with a very general meaning, which could be disambiguated either in the context of the article in question or with reference to the reader’s personal situation or experience (e.g. in the following headlines *How can I tame my flirty man?* Cosmo 2007, 140; *I can’t tell him my secret* Cosmo 2007, 138).

The effort to present the problems as personal but at the same time as generally relevant is further supported by the way in which the texts get the readers involved by using the second person pronoun, which combines the function of an informal general subject with a direct address (e.g. *The one thing that attracts you to him can also drive a wedge between you.* Cosmo 2007, 126), the inclusive first person plural pronoun (e.g. *We’re all part of a huge members’ club [...]* Cosmo 2007, 81), and employing utterances with generic reference (e.g. *So what makes smart, confident young women take such a drastic step?* Cosmo 2007, 60).

The vague and context-dependent vocabulary, informality of expression and the effort to get the receivers involved, illustrated in the above-mentioned examples, also produce evidence of another tendency prominent in contemporary mass media discourse, namely its conversationalisation (Fairclough, 1995a). Appeal to the reader and the conversation-like structure of lifestyle magazine texts become even more explicit in questions suggesting assumed familiarity of situations and feelings, presupposing shared experience: *“Have you ever had one of those moments when you feel everything in your life is coming together? That’s how I felt in that bar.* (Cosmo 2007, 41). The quotation marks at the end of the example are not missing by mistake; quotes that are never unquoted are used regularly at the beginnings of paragraphs in texts narrated in the first person singular. It reminds the reader of the primarily spoken character of the text and, in accordance with the other features of orality, creates the atmosphere of a friendly personal encounter.

The pages of *Cosmopolitan* magazine are interwoven with references to *Cosmopolitan* web pages – it is on the discussion forums, blogs and chats that the desired interaction built in the magazine articles can take the next step. Promoting virtual interaction also plays an

important role in the strategy geared towards constructing a cohesive female group of loyal readers; here *Cosmopolitan* becomes a metaphor for the whole community: *Get closer to Cosmo. From writing your blog and chatting to other Cosmo girls, to reviewing products and confessing your sins, be part of your favourite magazine at www.cosmopolitan.co.uk.* (Cosmo 2007, 119).

As the communication strategies revealed indicate, the function of *Cosmopolitan* magazine should not be primarily defined as entertaining or informative but as social or contact (phatic). In other words, although written, the texts of the magazine are in many aspects very close to spoken communication.

The fact that the strategies have been successfully tailored to prospective readers’ needs and expectations is regularly proved by the numbers of issues sold, and has also been supported by research. Drawing upon a corpus of interviews with a variety of women’s magazine readers, Joke Hermes (Hermes 1995) brought findings which correspond with surprising precision to the results of the text analysis. Her interviewees explained that they read the magazines “to recognize that other people have the same problems [...]” (Hermes 1995, 44), they appreciate them “as a means of becoming less insecure, less frightened by all that may destroy the safe and comfortable routine of their lives, their relationships, their confidence that they are doing ‘the right thing’ ” (Hermes 1995, 45). The topics addressed in the articles need not be theirs, but they can always fantasize that they could be in future: “Whatever may happen, she has trained herself to come up with solutions for virtually anything.” (Hermes 1995, 39). This sense of control, even if fictional, is still satisfying and makes women’s magazines a desirable piece of “mental chocolate” (Hermes 1995, 49).

The shapes and shades of advertising

Feelings and emotions aroused are instrumental in achieving purely commercial ends; besides selling the magazine itself, they advertise new films (e.g. within interviews: *Next up is a fluffy comedy with (who else?) Jessica Simpson.* Cosmo 2007, 121), plug popular books (e.g. within a long article on weight problems: *Monica’s book, The Revenge Diet, will help you lose 15lbs in a month. [...] For more info on this diet, Monica’s book, The Revenge Diet [...] is available to purchase via her website [...]* Cosmo 2007, 67, 68) or promote charities (a three-page ‘diary’ article describing a young lady’s boyfriend and husband suffering from cancer and his unavoidable death including the farewell ceremony finally results in *To help other cancer sufferers and their families, Heidi requests that readers make a donation to Marie Curie, on www[...]* Cosmo 2007, 106).

An analysis of the nature of advertising in *Cosmopolitan* and other women’s magazines would require a separate study and is beyond the scope of the present discussion, which will limit itself to the following brief remarks.

Firstly, it should be emphasized that advertising and promotion is omnipresent throughout the magazine (see the examples mentioned above). Penetrating nearly all the columns and articles, advertising appears in a myriad of forms and with different degrees of intensity in its persuasive character. Regular *Cosmopolitan* columns called *Cosmo Advertisement* and *Cosmo Promotion* thus seem to be highly misleading in suggesting a division of genres or discourses that in fact does not exist here. Advertising in lifestyle magazines would defy any rigid classification; its analysis would be manageable only with the help of the presence-absence scale introduced earlier in this essay.

Secondly, the choice of products advertised, their brand and price, accompanying photographs as well as the language used contribute substantially to constructing the target reader. Advertisements in *Cosmopolitan* seem to meet the needs of young women between 20 and 30 (they include slogans like: *Too old for teenage skin?* Cosmo 2007, 43, but anti-ageing

products are rare exceptions), with lower or lower-middle income (expensive brands and designer clothes are not advertised).

Voices

As mentioned in the course of the discussion, the *Cosmopolitan* discourse is characterized by the dominant role of confessions, sharing experiences and feelings, building a close female community bonded by shared knowledge and attitudes. So who then forms the ‘Cosmo’ social group, which the readers are heartily invited to join or in which they are simply included? To be more specific, which voices (i.e. “identities of particular individual or collective agents”, Fairclough 1995a, 77) take part in the conversation-like communication?

The voices represented include, first and foremost, ordinary women without any outstanding traits but still coping with demanding or extreme situations, celebrities presented here with an emphasis on their weak points and common human problems, representatives of us all, and experts – psychologists, doctors, dieticians, lawyers, trainers, and so on. This Cosmo community is exclusively female company, with men only visitors, presented or at least framed by female voices.

Among all the voices, prominence is clearly given to *Cosmopolitan* itself. The Cosmo voice acquires a manifold and variable identity, referring either to the whole community of *Cosmopolitan* writers and readers, or only to the writers, sometimes perhaps just to one of these groups. This ambiguity serves well the overall intention of removing and preventing any possible barriers or division lines between the readers, experts and writers. Regardless of their professional role or social position, in the Cosmo world they are all equal, with the conversational tone suspending any intervening differences of social status.

The informal, friendly relationship is a crucial quality: as a friend, *Cosmopolitan* has the authority to win readers’ confidence, to give advice, to be quite ‘blunt’ and direct in communication without risking criticism for being impolite. This strategy brings the discourse of women’s magazines close to that of advertising, one of its typical manifestations being the use of imperatives in the function of strong advice, usually coupled with a preceding question stating the problem discussed; this is actually a question-answer adjacency pair where *Cosmopolitan* plays the role of a wise friend who not only anticipates readers’ difficulties but also knows what to do, e.g.:

Dump your psycho-baggage – and lose a stone!
Why is it that our body size increases and decreases in tune with what’s going on in our hearts,
heads and beds? Cosmo shows you how to take control (Cosmo 2007, 65).
What turns a good relationship into a last-forever one? Three simple secrets. Take our test
to find out if your love has what it takes – and how to make it stronger (Cosmo 2006, 87).

The primary function of the Cosmo voice is framing: it asks celebrities questions in interviews, introduces ordinary people’s narratives in monologic texts as well as presenting experts’ advice. *Cosmopolitan* is always present as a mediator, introducing the text, indicating the topic, evaluating its effect. “Non-event-line elements” are highlighted and stress the importance of *Cosmo* in the communication (for “non-event-line elements” and mediation, see Labov 1972, in Fairclough 1995a, 91, 92). The readers are regularly reminded that all the information has reached them only thanks to *Cosmo* and at the same time they are told whether the information should be perceived as interesting, funny, dramatic or unbelievable, e.g.:

Halle Berry, 40, reveals her dramatic life experiences, from her first crush to contemplating
suicide... (a sub-headline for an interview, Cosmo 2007, 35).

Fearne Cotton is, without doubt, the girl of the moment. So, inevitably, her love life is a cause
of speculation. She comes clean to Cosmo about everything, including those royal heir rumours
(a sub-headline for an article based on an interview,
transformed into a narrative alternating direct and free
indirect speech, Cosmo 2007, 55).

The non-event-line elements find their realization especially in headlines, sub-headlines and introductory paragraphs, all of which receive graphic prominence. In the corpus analyzed, no more than 13% of headlines appeared in the magazine without any accompanying sub-headline.

A high level of mediation of information by *Cosmo* presenters can be found in articles that are apparently based on preceding interviews, which are retold for the readers (as suggested in the comments above). The combination of descriptive phrases (*Fearne is all about cheekiness*. Cosmo 2007, 55), narrative reports of speech acts (*Fearne confesses to being blissfully loved up with her new man [...] Cosmo 2007, 55*), free indirect speech (*Has she always been confident about dating?* Cosmo 2007, 55) and direct speech commented on in reporting clauses (*“He’s my toy boy. I know, it’s terrible!” she screeches, not finding it terrible at all.* Cosmo 2007, 55) seems to be an effective strategy keeping the narrator/*Cosmopolitan* in its intervening position between the character and the reader and at the same time conveying the flavour of the character’s words and the feeling of authenticity of the whole event (Leech, Short, 1981, 326).

Not even the experts’ voice is employed as independent; they offer their advice as *Cosmo’s psychologist, Dr Linda Papadopoulos, Cosmo’s sex psychotherapist, Rachel Morris or Cosmo life coach Irma [...] here [i.e. in Cosmopolitan] for you when your friends can’t be* (Cosmo 2007, 138, 140, 142).

Evaluation brought by *Cosmopolitan* as a presenter is positively oriented. Never objecting to any female character’s attitudes, producing preferred answers, counterbalancing the writers’, celebrities’ as well as experts’ authority by presenting them as not dissimilar from ordinary readers, the magazine strives to create an atmosphere of approval and sympathy, in other words an atmosphere of rapport, which is what women generally seek in communication (see e.g. Tannen 1990). With the highly elaborated realizations of one of the principles of politeness: ‘make your receiver feel good’, the readers gladly overlook the explicit and implicit violations of the other two: ‘do not impose’ and ‘give options’ (Lakoff 1973, in Cook 1989, 33).

HARPER’S BAZAAR: Fabulous at every age Topics and the target reader

Even though *Harper’s Bazaar* magazine focuses on fashion, ‘fashion’ does not belong among its most frequently used words. The key expression and concept governing the magazine is ‘style’. Unlike the word ‘fashion’, ‘style’ does not imply a possible passing fancy, more or less successful trends of limited duration; instead, ‘style’ is associated with timelessness, originality and individuality, something always valued as an essential part of one’s personality.

Without any further specifications the motto of the magazine *A Life in Style* allows for a wide range of interpretations and thus may attract a great variety of readers. The tendency to employ expressions vague enough not to exclude too many readers – while at the same time specific enough to facilitate the construction of a target group of readers that would feel bonded by the principles and attitudes which the magazine represents – is typical of all three magazines discussed; the difference can be found in its specific realization aimed at three ‘different’ women’s worlds.

Besides their common interest in fashion, *Harper's Bazaar* prospective readers are expected to be middle-aged (between the ages of 30 and 40), upper-middle class or of higher social status, and with a corresponding income. How these characteristics ensue from the magazine's discourse is suggested in the following paragraphs.

In *Harper's Bazaar*, a woman's identity stems from what she wears. Women are always viewed through the clothes they have on: [...] says Milla, who looks every inch the chic L.A. mom in Jil Sander boots, snug jeans, and a white cotton voile blouse of her own design. (H.B. 2007, 158) or Ines de la Fressange, while scoping out the latest cheap finds, wears her own brilliant high-low combination: a [...] coat with affordable [...] corduroys, finishing off with Roger Vivier accessories (H.B. 2007, 75). The importance of their clothes dwarfs any other features of their identity: Whether your day is spent in front of a computer, in meetings, or at luncheons, dressing professionally and appropriately counts (H.B. 2007, 110); the changing taste revealed in your wardrobe is seen as an eloquent reflection of changes in your life: Perhaps the imprint of Diana, forever 36, is so vivid because her journey from girlish innocence to womanly maturity was made in front of the flashbulbs. And nothing tells that story more than her clothes, as the coltish young aristocrat became prisoner of the palace and ultimately escaped as an independent woman in an international world of glamour (H.B. 2007, 222).

The final phrase *an independent woman in an international world of glamour* sounds almost symbolic, summarizing very precisely the aims and offers of the magazine: it characterizes the type of women presented and the way they are introduced; it also defines the goal which women readers may 'easily' achieve when following the instruction of *Harper's Bazaar*.

In contrast to *Cosmopolitan*, problems of everyday life do not provide topics for discussion; the celebrities and experts appearing in the texts are all in one way or another tied up with the world of fashion and are here to pose as examples, as advisors offering tips enhancing readers' clothing and consequently shopping. Columns such as *Great Finds Special* with sub-columns *Expert Shopping Tips* or *Smart Shopping* show searching for clothes and accessories through models' and designers' eyes as a craft, skill and last but not least, an exciting hobby and adventure.

Building one's image through clothing and appearance in general is presented as being closely related to the arts: this relation is both implied by regular feature articles about photographers, sculptors, designers or art gallery managers and explicitly emphasized by occasional quotations and comments: "Steve (Stevie Wonder) said, 'Designing is the same thing as music. When you do something, it's forever recorded.'" (H.B. 2007, 158).

Genres and voices

The genre structure of the magazine, as well as the overall manner of its organization, lacks the somewhat chaotic impression given by *Cosmopolitan*. A more systematic division into feature articles, interviews and instructions, accompanied and penetrated by advertising, tries to meet expectations of a self-confident, mature and financially secure middle-aged woman who already knows what she wants and who does not feel lost in life any more. Thus she is not attacked by confessions and pleas for her to confess; she is not forced to identify herself with the problems and weaknesses of others.

Celebrities are carefully selected to represent mostly positive qualities and high achievements, and they are presented as such. For example, in two issues of the magazine (totalling 514 pages), there is only one article focused on a celebrity scandal (*Living La Vida Lohan*, H.B. 2007, 226) and this is written from a surprisingly detached point of view including an ironic twist showing that even the atmosphere of rapport in female

communication may have its limits: *Dina is sipping from a glass of Montrachet. It has been reported that sipping the Montrachet in front of Lindsay was an issue. "It's not a weird, freaky thing," Dina says. "No, we're normal. It's normalcy."*; *Attention, everyone: Dina Lohan, née Donata Sullivan, will have you know she comes from a solid Irish-Italian stock* (H.B. 2007, 228).

Men and relationships are not absent but backgrounded; hunting for the One and an autopsy of partnership problems are not the focus of attention. The opposition of the male and female worlds sustained by *Cosmopolitan* is substituted by a view of men and women as independent individualities, meeting and co-operating within their field of interest (here, the fields of fashion design and art). In the *Harper's Bazaar* world of fashion, men are not emphasized as the essential motivation for women's self-care; their motivating power is either implicit (describing the desired qualities of clothes or appearance as *sexy* or *attractive*) or mentioned on the margins of an account (e.g. in a text about the positive points of being over fifty: *A confident, seasoned woman can drive a man a little crazy by switching between maternal warmth and high-voltage sexuality.*, H.B. 2007, 122).

Although the choice of voices appearing in *Harper's Bazaar* is comparable with those in *Cosmopolitan*, the importance assigned to each of them is balanced in a substantially different manner. The dominant role is taken over by experts and celebrities (seen as experts on arts and a life in style) speaking for themselves without the intrusive framing of a *Harper's Bazaar* reporter or the magazine as such. Rather than insisting on the closeness of the community of the magazine and its readers, the communication strategy employed here is less imposing, based on looser bonding and showing respect for independent individuality.

The level of mediation by the presenters is – in comparison with *Cosmopolitan* – lower; even if the name of the magazine appears in column headlines, it is rarely seen in article headlines or sub-headlines; its personification is an exception (*Bazaar celebrates affordable fashion* [...], H.B. 2007, 70), never playing the role of a participant in real-life conversation. Interviewees reveal their experiences and attitudes to individual reporters, not to *Harper's Bazaar* as an identity of its own.

The voice of 'a common woman' or 'ordinary people' is not sought; in the volumes closely studied for the purpose of this analysis it is represented only once, in a confession-like text about fighting drug addiction (*Road from perdition*, H.B. 2006, 229).

Similarly to *Cosmopolitan*, 90% of the *Harper's Bazaar* headlines are complemented with descriptive sub-headlines introducing the topic as well as suggesting an evaluation: *Dark energy. Pearl Lowe's new range of bewitching bespoke gothic pieces are catapulting the multi-talented rock chick onto fashion's front line, says Sara Buys* (H.B. 2006, 63) or *Paul Poiret. The revolutionary designer was one of the many lively characters who helped shape Bazaar's 140-year history* (H.B. 2007, 48). As is briefly illustrated by these examples, the question-answer headline pattern dominating in *Cosmopolitan* is here outweighed by the combination of nominal phrases and declarative sentences.

Conversationalised openings are typical of advertising-oriented texts, whether short-copy advertisements or lengthy feature articles with references to shop offers (e.g. *In a season of romantic and space-age styles, what to wear to work? Luckily, there are lots of polished pieces out there, from slim suits to dress-and-coat combos.* H.B. 2007, 109) or instructive books newly published (*What's age got to do with it? More than 6,000 American women turn 50 every day. Their passion, high-voltage sexuality, and impressive spending power are something to celebrate. Remember when women groaned that after 50 they became invisible? Well, have you noticed the new "Beauty Icon" at M.A.C.? It's Raquel Welch – still alluring at 66.* H.B. 2007, 122).

A note on lexis: the stylistic significance of premodifiers

As was mentioned above, the *Harper's Bazaar* world is the world of fashion. Linguistically, the world of fashion seems to be the world of adjectives, or rather pre-modifiers of all kinds and forms. With metaphoric creativity, drawing upon lexis from the full range of the formal-to-informal scale, they bring vivid and attention-attracting descriptions often coupled with highly emotional evaluation: *faceless, designer-clad, stick-thin, stylist-led ingénues; precocious, mouthy outbursts; feminine street style; aesthetic-free spirited; wildlife-inspired designs; potentially tricky trends; larger-than-life bags; beach-holiday must-packs; purse-friendly pick*. When advertising purposes take control, emotionality and exaggeration grow in series of intensifiers and superlatives: *hugely desirable, most flattering, particularly fabulous, hottest, newest, latest*. No matter how eloquent they try to be, such expressions are in effect quite vague; this vagueness – although balanced with frequent visualizations in sets of photographs – gives the readers freedom of interpretation.

Age as a key factor

A most significant feature of the *Harper's Bazaar* magazine is an obsession with age and an implicit fear of aging manifested in countless instructions on how to fight it. Aging is on the one hand praised; in the above-mentioned text about women over fifty e.g., age-related positives are almost advertised, with the women described using all kinds of sensual perceptions as *alluring, delicious, with a knowing smile, silver hair and proudly plunging necklines, seasoned, marinated in life experience, spicy, mellow, sweet, tart, as the healthiest, the best educated*, and last but not least as *the most selective shoppers with impressive spending power* (H.B. 2007, 122). On the other hand, paradoxically, an essential part of advertising concentrates on fighting the process of aging. Readers are offered *anti-aging* products for *mid-life skin* with the following samples of slogans: *Fight what ages you most. [Hint: dullness, discoloration and brown spots, not just wrinkles]; Fight crow's feet on your arms, and legs. New Olay Age Transform brings anti-aging to body.; New Aveeno. Positively Ageless. Rejuvenating Serum [...] to enhance vitality and slow aging*. For a discussion of anti-aging product advertisements in women's magazines, see Tomášková (2009).

The language of advertising thus clearly defines the target reader in terms of her age and also financial security – referring to designer clothes, luxurious brands and expensive high street shops.

FIT PREGNANCY: MOM & BABY: Now what?

Aims of the magazine and the social role of the target reader

As is made explicit in its title, the magazine reader is targeted by her social role – motherhood, which dwarfs any other feature such as age or income status. Of all the three magazines analyzed here, *Fit Pregnancy: Mom & Baby* most closely resembles self-help literature. This corresponds with the objective set out by the magazine's creators in the editor's note: *Our primary goal at Mom & Baby is to help you new mothers who are – as I was – terrified at your lack of experience* (FP 2007, 10). The self-help nature of most female reading is also emphasized by Hermés (Hermés 1995).

Magazine texts strive to cover a wide range of problems and difficulties which new mothers may possibly encounter shortly before and after childbirth and during the first weeks or months at home. Their function consists in informing and educating, influencing people's/mothers' behaviour and shaping their attitudes. Persuasion emerges as strong advice realized in a limited set of linguistic forms with the desired perlocutionary effect achieved

through a variety of communication strategies working towards winning confidence and authority among the readers. The magazine is ready to serve as *your handbook providing accessible info you'll want to tear out and keep handy at your breastfeeding "nest" or bedside* (FP 2007, 10).

Guiding voices

The guidance mediated by the magazine reaches the readers through the voices of experts and magazine writers. Their trustworthiness and authority are based on professional expertise (in case of doctors/paediatricians, gynaecologists, psychologists, therapists) and, more generally, on the social role they all share – parenthood. Expert voices are identified as *the father of three* or *the mother of two*, similar characteristics confirm the competence of common people's voices, with their articles signed *by Pete Nelson. Pete Nelson and his wife, Jen, are raising their son, Jack, in Massachusetts* (FP 2007, 45).

On communication strategies: between the frightening and the reassuring

The tone of the editorial anticipates the principle governing the magazine as a whole; under the title *Home at last and scared to death: everything you need to know about your new life* the writer presents coming home with a newborn as *the scariest moment* when new mothers feel *totally unprepared* and *petrified*; the editor offers herself as a vivid example of a formerly *terrified, most clueless mother who ever lived*, who was not able to cope with her baby's *crying jag*. As might be stereotypically expected, the father – soon *exhausted* – cannot help either and the rescue finally comes from a neighbour, an experienced mother: *"Gimme that baby," she commanded, [...] Judy gave me invaluable advice [...]* (FP 2007, 10). The writer's revelation of her own weakness and helplessness proves the general relevance of the problems mentioned, suspends possible detachment and serves as a bonding strategy. The atmosphere of uncertainty, fear or despair shrouding new motherhood is presupposed as known or expected, and effectively brings out the experienced and easy help that the magazine offers. Communication strategies evoking uncertainty are often mentioned as being constitutive of any persuasive and/or manipulative discourse (Doubravová 2008, Van Dijk 2006).

The contrast between difficulty and ease, between the frightening and the reassuring is well reflected in the language used, where the scary feelings are associated with the prospective readers (addressed as *you, your*) and the harmonizing with the magazine voices (*we*), e.g.:

We tell you everything you need to know about taking care of yourself as well as your newborn, from the moment he makes his entrance to those delirious first days at home
(FP 2007, 57).

Sleep: baby's and yours. We answer your most pressing questions about this most vexing topic
(FP 2007, 70).

Here's a peek at what happens during that first mysterious day with your new baby
(FP 2007, 58).

Even a happy fearless mother is reminded of possible dangers and offered help:

You've no doubt been dreaming about your baby's birth day for months... but chances are, you haven't really considered what life with a newborn is like. Well, we've been there, and we're here for you. On these pages you'll discover not only how to survive all the ups and downs of life with a new baby but also how to thrive
(FP 2007, 57).

You're ecstatic to be at home, but chances are that you're a bit unprepared for the round-the-clock care a baby requires. Here's info on taking care of yourself too (FP 2007, 60).

As illustrated in the examples above, here – unlike in *Cosmopolitan* – imposed presuppositions are politely balanced with modality, which is not limited to expressing certainty, even though certainty generally prevails:

Using the flash can result in a washed-out look, so you'll want to take advantage of natural light whenever you can... (FP 2007, 12).
You will recover, of course... (FP 2007, 26).

Admittedly, uses of modal expressions of possibility or probability meet the expectations of the politeness principle, but they also appear to be motivated by the fact that target readers include many pregnant women for whom most of the situations discussed are of a hypothetical character:

... line up help with meals and chores for the first few weeks, if possible (FP 2007, 22).
Even the best marriage may hit some bumps when a baby comes on board, but you can keep it on track (FP 2007, 46).
After having a baby, you may feel so wiped out ... You also may be eyeing your post-baby body... (FP 2007, 26).

Instruction as a dominating genre

The self-help character of the magazine texts determines the dominating genre – instruction. To ensure the accessibility of information promised in the editorial, the form of instructive texts is kept very simple and matter-of-fact. In contrast to *Cosmopolitan* and *Harper's Bazaar*, short and informative headlines (more than 50% without any sub-headline) are mostly realized as imperative or declarative clauses. Unlike the preparatory dialogical structures pervasive e.g. in *Cosmopolitan* magazine, the headlines and subsequent articles in *Fit Pregnancy* immediately come to the point and often explicitly mirror the discourse of technical instruction:

Plan to get up and about. Expect unexpected pain. Prepare to take it easy at home. Embrace your baby birth set of sub-headlines, (FP 2007, 22, 24).
Your nipples are sore. You develop clogged ducts. Your baby nurses all the time. You can't tell if she's getting enough. You're exhausted set of sub-headlines, (FP 2007, 40).
How to raise a trim kid (FP 2007, 34).
Your newborn: a user's guide (FP 2007, 68).

As the advice provided usually does not require the steps to be taken in a fixed order, instructive texts tend to be organised as text colonies with a set of short articles grouped around a central topic, facilitating quick and goal-directed reading.

The blunt imposition of the flood of imperatives is regularly mitigated by rationales for the course of action recommended. Accompanying explanations draw upon professional or even scientific discourse, which supports the authority of the magazine as a professional advisor:

"Infancy is a critical period when nutritional or other modifiable factors may partially contribute to childhood obesity,"... Read on to learn how you can establish healthy habits that will last him a lifetime (FP 2007, 34).

To keep yourself and your baby healthy, make sure you get your daily dose of the vitamins and minerals listed here (FP 2007, 62).

The regular mitigation of impositions – by means of modality expressing possibility or probability and by rationalizing suggested actions and providing explanations of reasons or consequences – shows respect to the female reader, who is seen as the final authority in deciding on matters related to her child. This mitigation partly balances out the authoritative, patronizing approach constructing the readers as helpless new mothers who are scared to death, needing help that can only come from professionals or other, more experienced mothers – both represented here by the magazine.

Conclusion

This brief and somewhat sketchy discussion of three examples of women's magazines, I believe, has shown that their diversifying features go hand in hand with unifying aspects, or in other words, that any kind of differentiation in fact takes place within a unifying, constant frame. The essential, omnipresent feature is help or advice from an authority, which women are expected to need throughout their life in whatever role they may play. It is just the manner of their presentation and the persuasive strategy employed that differ.

All three magazines generally lean on expected social stereotypes: they meet the needs of overemotional young women, seeking advice and approval to guide their behaviour in each and every situation, of middle-aged women fighting the signs of aging, of new mothers, who – regardless of age – feel lost in their new role. It is always a women's world with men opposed, ridiculed, or excluded, respected as professionals in a field rather than partners in everyday life. It is the magazine that presents itself as an indispensable, knowledgeable and entertaining partner.

The tone reflected in the direct, informal, conversationalized ways of expression could be characterized mostly as authoritative and patronizing. A more respectful approach seen in *Harper's Bazaar* seems to be conditioned by the age and particularly the social status of prospective readers associated with financial security.

The language of all the three titles substantially draws upon the discourse of advertising, aiming at a double purpose of selling the magazines themselves as well as the products offered.

Abbreviations used:

COSMO Cosmopolitan
HB Harper's Bazaar
FP Fit Pregnancy: Mom & Baby

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Address:
University of Ostrava
Faculty of Arts
Dpt. of English and American Studies
Reální 5,
701 03 Ostrava
Czech Republic
Renata.Tomaskova@osu.cz