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## NEW JOURNALISTIC GENRES IN SOCIAL WEEKLIES: A STATISTICAL PROBE

### NOVI NOVINSKI ŽANROVI U DRUŠTVENIM TJEDNICIMA: STATISTIČKA PROBA

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#### *Abstract*

The traditional system of journalistic genres requires an update, which was attempted in a relatively coherent concept by T. Rončáková. We applied her genre classification containing both new and traditional genres to a sample of Slovak social weeklies and statistically tested the presence and quantity of individual genres. At the same time, we examined the presence of the author's opinion, verbs in the 1st person singular and the hidden advertising in the texts. The presented findings on genres and the presence of opinions, subjectivity and hidden advertising were interpreted in the context of the classification of individual periodicals, either elite or lifestyle ones, which helped determine the impact of the tabloid orientation of periodicals on their content and form.

#### *Sažetak*

Tradicionalni sustav novinarskih žanrova zahtijeva ažuriranje, što je T. Rončáková pokušala u relativno koherentnom konceptu. Primijenili smo njezinu žanrovsku klasifikaciju koja sadrži nove i tradicionalne žanrove na uzorku slovačkih društvenih tjednika, te smo statistički ispitali prisutnost i količinu pojedinih žanrova. Istodobno smo ispitali prisutnost autorovog mišljenja, glagole u jednini 1. lica i skrivene reklame u tekstovima. Predstavljeni nalazi o žanrovima i prisutnosti mišljenja, subjektivnosti i skrivenog oglašavanja interpretirani su u kontekstu klasifikacije pojedinih periodičnih publikacija, bilo elitnih, bilo životnih, što je pomoglo u utvrđivanju utjecaja tabloidne orijentacije periodike na njihov sadržaj i oblik.

#### **Introduction and the state of the art**

The genre is generally understood as a model, pattern, or a scheme that works in a certain historical, cultural and linguistic environment in the minds of the creators and recipients of the communication, and facilitates its coding and decoding as much as possible/1/. In addition to the formal features of the genre, theorists emphasize the importance of the pragmatic component, i.e. the communication function that determines the choice of the topic and style /2/.

In the context of genology, the dynamics of development is now increasingly emphasized, leading to scepticism concerning any genre models and definitions. Significant development and changes relate to genres in the online media /3/, where brand new forms have to be named and defined. In the traditional electronic and print media, tendencies to entertain /4/ and to hybridize /5/ are noticed. Theorists and practitioners try to capture these current movements e.g. by accepting some models from foreign genology. In our print (Slovak and Czech)

environment, the longform text, diary or investigative text as distinctive genres have been accepted /6/. However, at the same time, there are also attempts to reassess established genre models and classifications, where completely new genres appear. In the Slovak environment, the above-mentioned trends are reflected in the approach of T. Rončáková /7/, that this paper is based on. We applied her genre classification to particular socio-political weeklies and examined the statistical occurrence of determined genres.

The concept of T. Rončáková is based on the observation that while many of the so-called traditional genres have already 'atrophied', i.e. lost connection with the current journalistic reality

/8/, in the media several defined genre forms have been established. They have been known in editorial and inter-editorial jargon but remain theoretically undetected. In her work on this topic /9/, T. Rončáková defines and categorizes genres of contemporary social weeklies. In addition to completely or partially new genres, she reviews or supplements some established ones. In total, she addresses 16 + 7 genres in 3 + 1 categories - see Tab. no. 1.

Table no. 1: Genre classification

Long-form genres	Short-form genres	Lifestyle genres	Traditional genres
hard longform text	news coverage	Phenomena	Editorial
soft longform text	news update	Gossip	readers' responses
analysis	Diary	good advice	Review
investigative text	Testimony	'ask the expert'	Interview
popular scientific texts		Teaser	Report
story			photo report
profile			essay <sup>20</sup>

## Methodology

T. Rončáková based her concept of contemporary journalistic genres in social weeklies on the content analysis of all Slovak social weeklies, i.e. *týždeň*, *Plus 7 dní*, *Život* and *Slovenka*. Due to this, we selected identical journals as our research sample to quantify the genre occurrence. In addition, we focused on the presence of the author's attitude, verbs in the 1st person singular and hidden advertising in the texts. There are four research questions:

1. To what extent are individual genres used in the weeklies?
2. In how many and in which texts (as concrete implementations of abstract genre models) are the personal authorial opinions present?

3. In how many and in which texts are the verbs in the 1st person singular used as a sign of subjective authorial approach?

4. In how many and in which texts is the hidden advertising present?

We added the question no. 4 later - because of the unexpected finding that emerged during the examination of the material - that some published texts carry clear signs of a commercial function. Conceptually, our research framework is based on quantitative-qualitative content analysis /10/, while focusing on genre-forming criteria in evaluating individual texts and assigning them to specific genres. For the purposes of this research, we adopted five genre-forming criteria of D. Slančová /11/, /12/, also applied by T. Rončáková in her basic re-

<sup>20</sup> In the context of the essay, attention should be drawn to its different concepts based on culture. According to M. Horváth, the essay has gone from the time of Michel de Montaigne "a fairly long and thorny journey", and virtually every national culture in which the essay was established and developed interpreted and modified it in its own way. While in the English language environment the essay is known mainly as an argumentative text with a relatively strict structure, Slovak linguistics understands the essay as a higher form of reflection - more complex, erudite, artistically valuable, stylistically complex and without a rigid structure. The essay as a genre develops (in the Slovak environment) mainly in the context of an independent essayist style, but at the same time, it also belongs to the traditional classifications of journalistic style genres, where its distinctiveness is determined mainly by social timeliness, certain simplicity and greater clarity.

search in order to link the two studies methodologically. Our research sample included all issues of selected weeklies in one month (June or July 2017), which in some cases (Plus 7 dní, Život) meant 4 issues, in others (.týždeň, Slovenka) 5 issues. Together we examined 651 texts, 580 of them were journalistic - see Tab. no. 2.

Tab. no. 2: Share of individual types of materials in the area of an issue

journalistic texts	66.49 %
non-journalistic texts	18.41 %
other (advertising)	15.10 %
	100.00 %

Non-journalistic materials were represented by the children's section, horoscope, crossword puzzles, recipes, competition, television program, text, jokes. In this context, a significant disproportion between .týždeň and the other weeklies is worth mentioning: while they achieved an average of 22.50% of non-journalistic materials, in .týždeň it was 0%. At the same time, .týždeň had less advertising (12.68%), thus the share of its journalistic materials in the area of the issue was noticeably higher than in the other weeklies - 87.32% compared to 61.87%.

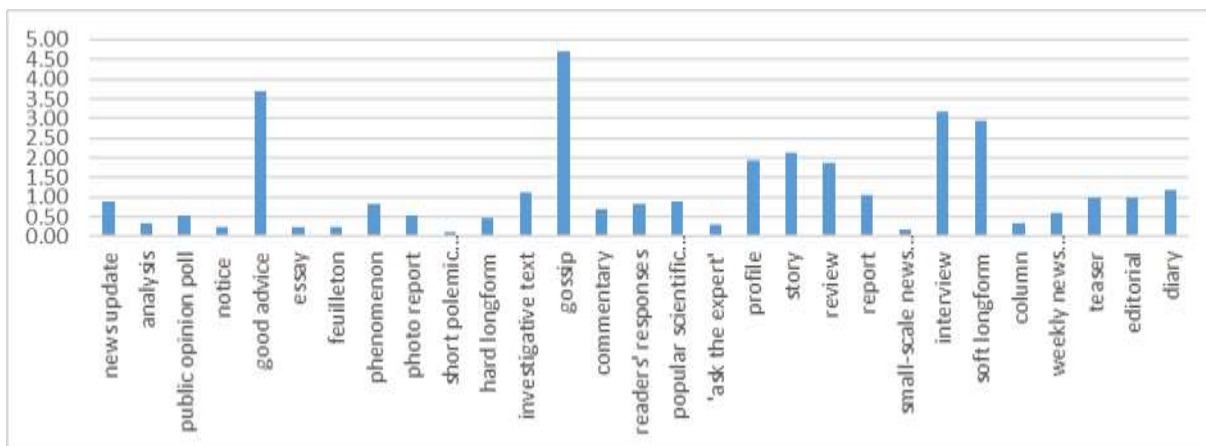
## Findings

### 1 Occurrence of genres

In the contemporary social weeklies in Slovakia, lifestyle genres of gossip and good advice clearly prevail in terms of quantity. The phenomenon is used less frequently - its breeding ground was mainly .týždeň. We found the 'ask an expert' genre exclusively in Život. Other popular genres were interviews, soft long-forms, stories, portraits, reviews, and reports, which, due to their larger scope, occupied a significant part of the total area of magazines. Interviews and stories, together with good advice, made up a considerable majority of the content, especially in Slovenka. Soft long forms were typical of Život. Short-form genres are very rarely used in magazines; we found diaries only in .týždeň. This finding also applied to the traditional genres of a similar extent: the column is exclusively published by .týždeň, the feuilleton appears occasionally in Plus 7 dní.

In terms of traditional genres, in addition to the interviews and reports mentioned above, editorials and readers' responses are used frequently, others are used marginally.

Fig. no. 1: Average number of genres per an issue



Generally, we can observe significant disproportions in the genre composition of the examined weeklies - as if genre preferences were maximally adapted to editorial and established practices. For more lifestyle-oriented magazines (Život, Slovenka) this means a relatively

strong formulaic character and genre monotony, while a certain elitism in the content of the magazine is reflected in a significantly more varied genre composition. Unlike other weeklies, Plus 7 dní used investigative texts, news updates, hard longforms and also provided more space to reports, popular scientific texts,

or news coverage. The weekly *.týždeň* was the only periodical to publish commentaries or essays, also provided greater space for analyzes, photo reports, phenomena, and reviews.

## 2 Presence of opinion

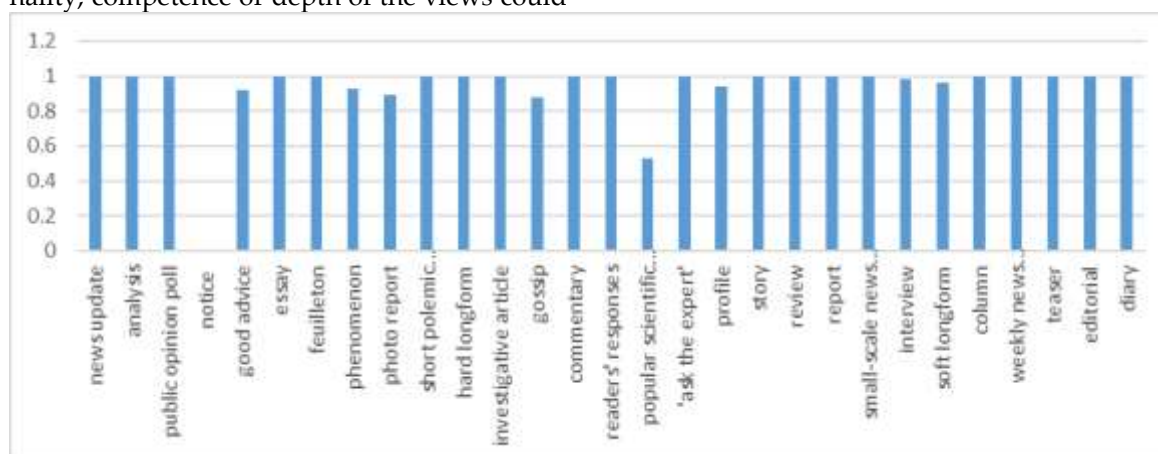
We recorded the presence of the author's opinion in the text by assigning 0 (absent) or 1 (present) to them. Subsequently, we calculated the average presence of opinion for each genre.

By recording the presence of opinion, we measured the ability of authors of a given periodical to present their attitude to the events and phenomena. This involvement in the topic is fairly even in all the magazines examined. The originality, competence or depth of the views could

be further explored, but this would require a different (substantially more complex) methodological instrument.

The average opinion presence in all weeklies was 0.94. The highest was in *.týždeň* (0.99), where out of the total corpus of 158 texts, only two opinions (text accompanying a photo report and popular scientific texts) were avoided. It was similar to *Slovenka*, where the opinion was present in all texts except for some good advice. The lowest opinion presence was recorded in *Život* (0.88).

Tab. no. 2: Average coefficient of the opinion presence



Non-subjective authorial attitudes are best suited to popular scientific texts, the only genre where the coefficient dropped by half (0.53). In the weekly *Plus 7 dní*, it was even only 0.38. Otherwise, the reduced presence of opinion was typical of lifestyle texts (phenomenon, good advice, gossip) and photojournalism. In these, we evaluated the accompanying texts and not the photographs themselves, which also bear the opinion of the author.

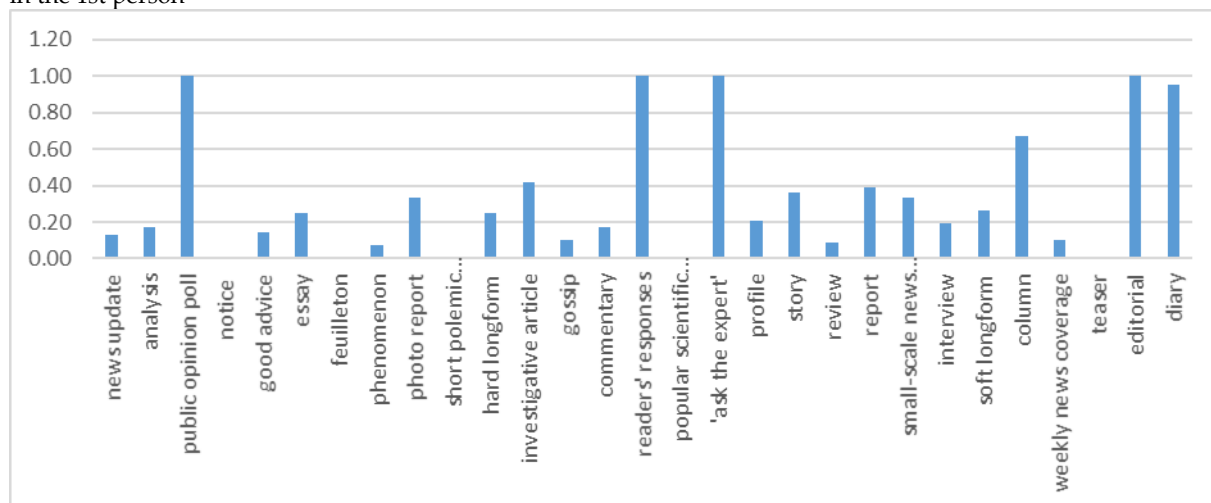
## 3 Presence of the verb in the 1st person

The presence of the verb in the 1st person is worth mentioning in terms of the degree of the text subjectivity. In the journalistic style, such a way of authorial engagement is generally considered undesirable and traditional rules of creating opinion genres (including commentaries, reports, etc.) offer a diverse range of other stylistic options for expressing attitude. The same approach is used to directly reach the audience in the 2nd person plural. These verb forms (in

the 1st or 2nd person) need to be used very sparingly and functionally; for example, in some *feuilletons* or reports to emphasize authenticity and credibility.

At present, however, also under the influence of the online (especially blog) communication sphere, we can observe an increased occurrence of verbal expressions in the 1st person. We have therefore decided to include this variable in our research. We found that its occurrence reached the average value 0.28, the highest was in *.týždeň* (0.41). In the other magazines, it moved relatively evenly above 0.2 (*Život* 0.27, *Slovenka* 0.22, *Plus 7 dní* 0.20). From the significant lead of *.týždeň*, we can infer the confidence or authority of the editors as well as the periodical as a whole in genres that require a clear and vigorous authorial stance (commentaries, columns, diaries, reports).

Fig. č. 3: Average coefficient of the presence of verbs in the 1st person



The 100% presence of the 1st person was confirmed in the texts where it was expected: editorials, readers' responses, 'ask the expert', and public opinion polls. Almost 100% was reached by the diary and over 50% by the column. The zero presence of the 1st person was confirmed as expected in popular scientific texts. The 0% presence was also unexpected in the case of a feuilleton or a short polemic commentary, but the occurrence of these genres was also very low. The use of the 1st person in hard longforms or news updates is slightly striking. In these genres, there was a difference between *.týždeň* and the rest of the sample: in *.týždeň*, there was zero occurrence of the 1st person, suggesting a less subjective approach to the current social issues. On the other hand, *.týždeň* used the first person in gossips more frequently (100% coefficient in this periodical), while the average in other magazines was 0.10%. This suggests a fundamentally different approach to this genre: while *.týždeň* presents gossips as subjective mini-commentaries, other magazines treat them as curiosities without an authorial input. The use of the verbal 1st person in investigative texts is also remarkable; this genre occurred most frequently in *Plus 7 dní*. It points to the more 'lifestyle approach' of this magazine to the investigative text genre: rather than an in-depth analysis of data, it is characterized by the intense involvement of the periodical in defending the rights of ordinary citizens, thereby acquiring elements of civil journalism.

There is a remarkable difference between editorials and commentaries, or between diaries and columns. Here, the subjectivity functions as one of the distinctive elements of the genre. Editorials are considerably more subjective than commentaries, diaries, and columns. A newly established diary genre can thus be distinguished from its relative - the column also on this basis.

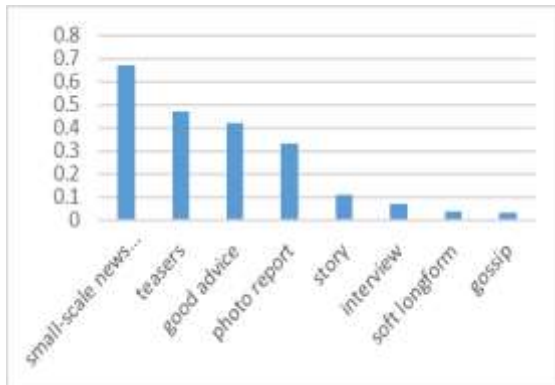
#### 4 Presence of advertising

The presence of hidden advertising in journalistic texts is generally considered unethical. However, in our research work with social weeklies, we noticed a frequent occurrence of this phenomenon in some of them, so we decided to record and evaluate it explicitly.

We solely paid attention to advertising without an advertising reference number, either hidden (in ethical terms) or apparently obvious that it could not even be considered hidden (such as advertising interviews), but still without any labelling or warning.

In *.týždeň* we did not record any advertising in any of the examined texts, so the average coefficient remained 0. The coefficient close to zero was in *Plus 7 dní* (0.03) and *Život* (0.04). A common average of 0.10 was achieved only by *Slovenka*, where the coefficient of the presence of advertising increased to 0.31 - thus the advertising signs could be noticed in up to a third of published texts (!).

Fig. č. 4: Average coefficient of the presence of advertising



We found out that more than half of the content of small-scale news reports, teasers and good advice in Slovenka composed of advertising. The editors also included it in several stories, interviews, soft longforms, and gossips. All photo reports in Slovenka showed signs of advertising. In the other periodicals, the genre almost exclusively infected with advertising was good advice (and one interview in Život).

Thus, good advice in magazines is clearly the most suitable genre for this kind of 'secondary **gainful** activity'. Besides it, the editors are subject to this temptation mainly in interviews, but

this has been confirmed to a lesser extent in our research.

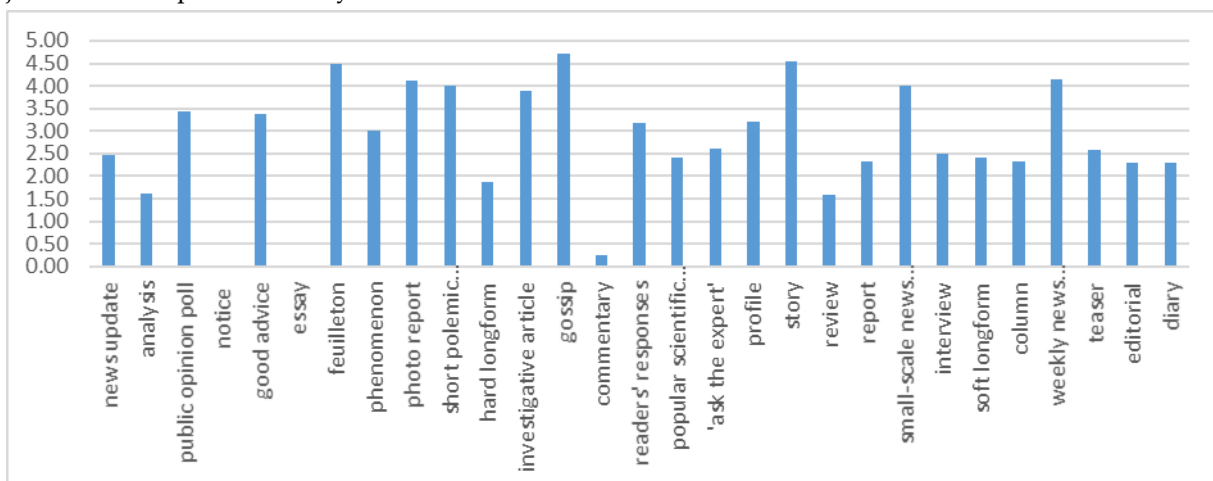
## 5 Tabloidism

In addition, we examined the tabloidiness of the texts, which we recorded in a qualitative way (with the necessary amount of subjectivity) on a scale of 0 to 5. For the purposes of this research, tabloidism is understood to include text features such as:

- sensationalism (the topic of the text is not socially important, only interesting, curious),
- superficiality (the topic is treated incompetently),
- exaltation (the means of expression are intended to affect emotions more than the topic requires),
- kitschiness (the means of expression lack originality and elegance, they are too pushy instead).

We observed these characteristics both in the language and in the content of the texts.

Fig. č. 5: Average coefficient of tabloidness



The average tabloidness coefficient reached 2.75, but as with the advertising presence coefficient, this figure does not reflect reality, because the differences between the magazines were too significant. The lowest recorded tabloidness was seen in .týždeň - 1.57. The average of the other weeklies was 3.38 (Plus 7dní 3.75, Slovenka 3.55, Život 3.50), the difference between the elite weekly and mass audience weeklies is, therefore, more than double.

We can observe that genres such as weekly news coverage, readers' responses, investigative texts, are also among the ones with the highest tabloidness rate. This means that in the magazines the quality-oriented approach has been abandoned in these genres and various tools have been used to attract the reader. The weekly news coverage was written in the style of punchy ironic short commentaries; readers' responses did not avoid the 'street language'

(especially when these were comments under articles or on Facebook); the investigative texts, in turn, took the form of committed solutions to civic problems or mafia stories.

### Interpretation and Conclusions

Our research confirmed that traditional journalistic genres in the current social weeklies are applied less frequently than the new genre forms identified by T. Rončáková. Typical weekly genres include gossip and good advice (from a lifestyle set of genres) and soft longforms (from long-form genres). These, along with traditional interviews, make up most of the content. However, this does not apply to the weekly *.týždeň* where good advice is absent and gossip is present at a minimum level (and in a different form than in other weeklies). On the other hand, the most frequent genres in terms of quantity are reviews and diaries, followed by commentaries, profiles, interviews, and soft longforms.

The opinion is present in 94% of texts in social weeklies. At the same time, it is more than 50% likely to be present in each genre. The lowest degree of opinion presence is in popular-educational texts (53%), in all others, it is at least 88%, while in most genres the presence of opinion is 100%. This finding is in line with the nature of the weekly press, which does not provide readers with basic news but aims to orientate, persuade, or entertain them. The nature of the presented opinions would deserve more detailed research, with a specific focus on their depth, originality, ability to help recipients understand the current affairs and shape their attitudes.

Authorial subjectivism materialized by the use of the verbal 1st person was recorded in more than 25% of the texts, confirming the tendency of contemporary media to speak to the recipient personally, even at the cost of disregarding the traditional journalistic principle according to which the author is in the background. This approach also affected genres such as hard longforms, news updates, and investigative texts. It suggests a superficial approach to the key social topics, focusing on aspects of civic engagement and everyday issues and not the complex in-depth analysis and the more abstract societal or historical dimension of phenomena.

The use of texts for the sponsor advertising and thus for some additional funding of the periodical was confirmed in only one of the four weeklies examined (*Slovenka*). In other cases, the coefficient of the presence of advertising was close to zero or zero (*.týždeň*). We can thus deduce that such an editorial strategy is not a necessity or a general trend, but a specific of a particular medium or publisher. Good advice, along with small-scale news reports, teasers and photo reports, proved to be the most suitable carriers of hidden advertising. The (massive) abuse of interviews for this purpose was not confirmed.

One of the most important outcomes of the presented research is the confirmation of the clear difference between elite and lifestyle magazines - also at the genre level. Elite magazines have a different - more varied and richer genre composition - unlike the relatively flat, formulaic genre composition of lifestyle magazines.

In our research, we deliberately selected tabloidness as one of the variables. Its values divided the examined sample into two uneven parts - one was represented by *.týždeň* and the other one by other magazines with approximately twice the tabloidness coefficient. This variable was also found in the news, readers' responses and investigative texts, which is related to the use of the verb in the 1st person mentioned above.

The verb in the 1st person singular was also one of the distinguishing features of elite and tabloid periodicals, but paradoxically, it was used twice more frequently in *.týždeň* than in the rest of the sample. It achieved high values in diaries and columns, which were not found in other magazines at all. Moreover, it was significantly higher in comparison with other magazines in reports, profiles and soft longforms. We noticed an extreme difference in the case of gossip, which in *.týždeň* was written only in the 1st person singular. It can be interpreted as a sign of a fundamentally different nature of this genre in the elite and lifestyle environment. In elite magazines, the gossipy characteristics of texts are not primarily based on the curiosity or sensationalism of the topic, but the unusual and surprising view of the author. Overall, we can consider the greater subjectivity of the mentioned genres as a manifestation of a higher self-confidence and opinion authority.

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