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HEDGING AND EUPHEMISMS

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Abstract

The following article is the basis for the research of euphemisms. They, being an important language component of political discourse, perform a number of functions which are especially important in this type of communication. Communicative features of euphemisms allow us to formulate accurately the spheres of political euphemisms, to systematize them into groups and to reveal the criteria of political euphemisms. In turn pragmatic features of euphemisms allow us to study their functions and ways of their influence on political discourse among which the most essential are focus on correct speech behavior, the aspiration of the political figure to mitigate possible contradictions, to veil some straight and harsh phrases, to disguise the essence of some realities with the aim of impact on audience. Pragmatic functions of euphemisms are expressed also through hedging. Hedging as communicative strategy is used quite often in modern political discourse and provides some kind of “speech insurance”, which is an attempt to make a statement more or less unclear. In some cases another function of hedges can be traced and it is linked to mitigation of a speech act in order to avoid any conflict between the speaker and the listener. Thus, euphemisms and hedges are part of modern research nowadays.

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1. Introduction

Communication has always been the most important feature of everyday life. People get in touch with each other through communication. We live in the era of communicative development. Any word that was uttered has a meaning and this meaning is very important and depends mainly on the recent situation in a country. The basis of human communication is made up of a language and the exchange of information. In the modern period there are two main functions of speech. They are the information exchange and interpersonal communication. In other words, when we speak each word not only bears value, but also carries a message and become a means of contact between people. In modern linguistics of one of actual problems is the importance to increase the efficiency of communication in certain situations. Here it is possible to write about means of expression of the communicative strategy of uncertainty or mitigation. Hedges and euphemisms in the speech act function as 'connectors' between people in order to avoid possible conflicts. That is why many researches have started to investigate the usage of euphemisms and hedges in discourses in order to understand what are their functions and why do people come to use them in their speech.

2. Problem Statement

Fundamental scientific problem to which this research is aimed is the identification of pragmatic features of euphemisms in political discourse which allow us to determine consistent patterns of their usage in political communication for effective interaction of the politician and audience by means of successful usage of politically correct lexicon. Features of the euphemisms considered in texts of political discourse reflect specifics of their usage in the speech that has to lead to a certain model of the organization of communication.

Now, both in domestic, and in foreign linguistics, there have been noticed some changes in the direction of study of a language. First of all, it is connected with the study of a language in operation – the way it operates in the speech, but not the study of its internal features. Now in the forefront there is the problem of functioning of a language in society. Language, being the main means of communication, serves our society in all spheres of its activity, being at the same time society's reflection of consciousness, and also, any language is formed under the influence of society. Therefore, the problem of study of a political discourse is necessary. The research of pragmatic aspect of euphemisms which are often used in political discourse to achieve successful communication is especially important. This lexicon is vied by the researchers as a very interesting field as it is dependent on the speech situation itself and the communicants who are involved in it. At the moment, many researches of political discourse are conducted, its main functions are presented, and however, there is no general definition of this concept. Some lexical means of a language, such as euphemisms, hedges which play an important role in pragmatics of political discourse are also poorly studied. In particular thanks to them some functions of political discourse gain some other features.

3. Research Questions

As the problem of political correctness and avoidance of possible speech conflicts is very important nowadays, a series of questions appear. These questions need a detailed research.

What are the main topics of euphemisms that are used in politically correct speech? This question is very topical due to the fact that the popularity of this or that group of euphemisms varies according to the current situation. If there is an economic crisis then the topic of economy will be at the top and so on.

What are the most important functions of euphemisms in political discourse? Here we need to analyse politicians' speech and detect pragmatic functions of euphemisms.

Why was the notion of hedging introduced into linguistics and why is it that important? The notion of hedges is broader than the notion of euphemisms, as we can say that euphemisms are part of hedges as they are the way of mitigation. That is why hedges are very important in recent studies of linguistics.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study consists in studying the communicative category of hedging in English political texts. This problem defines the following tasks to which this research is directed: to systematize and generalize approaches of foreign and domestic scientists to the problem of euphemisms and political discourse; to reveal the main functions of political discourse and euphemisation of the speech; to analyse communicative and pragmatic features of euphemisms in political texts; to specify the definition of the concept "hedging"; to define pragmatic functions of hedging.

5. Research Methods

Methods and approaches for the accomplishment of the tasks are the method of discourse analysis (cognitive and pragmatic) which allows to reveal causativity of usage of a certain lexeme and pragmatic settings of a speaker; the method of the structural and linguistic analysis of discourse; the method of lexicographic selection; the method of the analysis of dictionary definitions; the quantitative method; the stylistic analysis and also the contextual or interpretive analysis and the comparative method. All these methods deal with a language and its operation in a society, as in different spheres in different situations the same word gains different features or characteristics and its pragmatics differs as well from one speech act to another speech act.

6. Findings

Before passing to pragmatic functions of euphemisms it is necessary to reveal the most and the least widespread groups of euphemisms proceeding from their thematic or lexico-semantic classification. The prevalence of these groups in many respects depends on the present political, economic and social situation. As a result of the research of politicians' speeches it has been revealed that in the speech of authorities the most popular and widespread theme of euphemisms is the group of the euphemisms distracting from the negative phenomena of reality. One example of euphemisms in this group is the word "recession" instead

of the word “economic crisis”. Less widespread subjects of euphemisms in the sphere of politics are the topic of appearance of a person, his intellectual and physical defects, and the topic that mentions the age of a person and the topic of physiology. From above listed it is possible to claim that economic problems concern society most of all recently. It is also important to mark out structural and word-formation features of euphemisms in political discourse. However, the main attention needs to be paid to pragmatic features of euphemisms in political discourse. As they are often expressed through hedging, therefore, the analysis of the concept “hedging” is carried out, the main pragmatic functions of this phenomenon are underlined, among which concealment of information or desire to communicate the information to audience less categorically are the main ones.

The main functions which have been considered in these groups of euphemisms are the aspiration to avoid communicative failures or the conflicts; veiling the importance of the information; the aspiration to communicate the information to addressees so that it has been understood only by them. The most popular function of euphemisms is the aspiration to avoid the communicative conflicts. The results received earlier have shown that the particularity of the modern linguistic situation is expressed through the vast usage of euphemisms in political discourse. However, the side between usual lexicon and euphemisms in some texts is so indistinct that it is sometimes difficult to tell whether lexicon is euphemistic. However, pragmatic features of euphemisms act as their indicators in the speech as they bear special loading. According to the research, identification of pragmatic features in a political discourse is the most important.

The concept of hedging is new in linguistics and is little studied. The first was G. Lakoff in his article in 1970 considered the concept of a hedge. The article is called “Hedges: A Study in Meaning Criteria and the Logic of Fuzzy Concepts”. It is very interesting that communicative function of hedging isn't considered by Lakoff in his article. He expresses special attention to logical signs of the following words: in a manner of speaking, largely, rather and others (Lakoff, 1972). A hedge in its simple definition means “a barrier”, “a hindrance”. Being multidimensional, the hedge as an element of hedging unites in itself several factors – pragmatic, semantic and cognitive (Keckes, 2013).

But actually it was L. Zadeh who firstly started the description of the notion of hedging. But in his works he didn't use the particular name of this concept - hedging. He applied “fuzzy set theory” when modeling structure of any language. He analyzed hedges in English from the lexical point of view, relying on logic and semantics. According to this theory, blurring appears in case of defining a word of any category that is considered true only at any certain degree. That is, hedges from the lexical point of view will be correct to be used, only if the concepts are remote from its prototype: it is possible to tell “*An eel is something like fish*”, but the utterance “*A pike is something like fish*” will be absurd. As the result, Zadeh writes that concepts of any natural language possess very unclear borders, therefore, the speaker's utterances can be both not false, and not true, and if they true, they are true only to some certain degree or we are false also to a certain degree (Zadeh, 1965).

Hedges are means of expressing fuzziness. This concept is characterized by fuzziness, uncertainty, but it doesn't definitely mean something bad. The fuzziness is typical of a language which allots it various pragmatic functions (Ruchkina, 2015).

The pragmatic researches devoted to hedges are traced since 1980. Many researchers have focused the research on functions of hedging from the pragmatic part. In the communication speakers are inclined

to say something not very clearly, using hedges intentionally not to sound categorical and to make their communicated information sound more polite. Such hedges as “kind of”, “to some extent”, “somewhat”, “quite”, “entirely”, “more or less”, “really”, and “almost” are effective to use if there is a desire to sound polite in front of the listeners in a conversation (Fraser, 2010).

So, for example, in the sentence:

“*Our products are quite cheap*” – “quite” shows the main attitude of the speaker to the price, and at the same time this word says to the listener that there is some degree of flexibility in trade. Such hedge can have double function in the sentence: to let someone know clearly the idea of the speaker and to leave the corresponding freedom of action to the listener and give him the opportunity to decide and then accept his opinion.

“*Your suit is a little dirty*”.

The criticism of others conducts to the conflicts and threatens the listeners. In this case, a certain pragmatic strategy has to be used for the purpose to mitigate the threat. ‘A little’ adheres to ‘the principle of approval’ and shows that the speaker is trying to smooth the forthcoming possible conflict.

7. Conclusion

Thus, we come to the conclusion that the usage of politically correct lexicon is quite relevant nowadays. Euphemisms which perform the function of concealment, veiling the unwanted reality, act as one of types of politically correct lexicon. Moreover, politically correct lexicon is expressed through hedging, the main function of which is mitigation. Mitigation in political discourse is one of the ways to achieve success. A politician in political texts can use different softening means. Euphemisms or hedges are usually used as these softening means. So their main function is to reduce statement accuracy act. It happens because euphemisms and hedges are usually words with broad referential and semantic correlation. At the same time is it vital to mention that euphemisms and hedges are not at the same level. Hedges are a broader group and may include euphemisms as a way of realisation of mitigation and achievement of success in any discourse, in particular in political discourse.

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