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ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSE AS A TOOL TO CATEGORIZE PEOPLE BY AGE

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Abstract

Modern researches put forward an idea that it is impossible to separate language and discourse from social action. The consequence of this is the allocation of meanings, on the principle of “friend-or-foe”, transformed and generated through discourse. This problem has become particularly relevant in the research materials of environmental movements study of the recent years. In other words, the ecological discourse became the basis of meaningful social action and realized itself in social practices, namely the allocation of the young generation in society, environmentally oriented and denying and condemning the experience of other generations. This view of environmental discourse dictates a different approach to the consideration of its components. The material for this article was speeches presented by environmental activist Greta Thunberg, published in the book “No one is too small to make a difference” in 2019. To study Greta Thunberg’s speeches the method of analysis of the repertoires of interpretation according to J. Potter and M. Weatherell was implemented in the framework of the synthetic approach of the “discursive turn”. As a result, the author of the article identified and interpreted the main repertoires of the studied environmental teenager-activist’s speeches, identified the principles of age categorization of the society representatives in these texts, identified the forms and means of speech influence in the framework of the studied material.

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1. Introduction

Environmental (or ecological) discourse today involves a wide sociological behavioural context, and ecological discourse becomes the ground for meaningful social activities, change in behavioural patterns and is implemented in social practices (Aurélié, 2019). The allocation of the young generation, environmentally-friendly, and denying and condemning the experience of prior generations, is seen as a new trend with its followers to proliferate rapidly.

Moreover, environmental discourse of the recent days acquires a leader – Greta Thunberg, a teenager-activist who heads the movement with powerful speeches and opposes in her speeches to the modern rulers and is named a “Next Generation Leader” and the “Person of the Year” by the magazine *Time* (Alter, Haynes, & Worland, 2019; Haynes, 2019), (Figure 01, Figure 02).



Figure 01. Greta Thunberg on the cover page of the magazine Time – Next Generation Leader (<https://time.com/collection-post/5584902/greta-thunberg-next-generation-leaders/>)



Figure 02. Greta Thunberg on the cover page of the magazine Time – Person of the Year (<https://time.com/person-of-the-year-2019-greta-thunberg/>)

In the present article, it is proposed to consider the role of environmental discourse in the formation of a new environmental consciousness and of rapidly developing generation gap trend in the changing macrocontext of environmental (ecological) discourse. Thus, the purpose of this article is to study Greta Thunberg's speeches on the problems of environment from the point of view of the linguistic means used by the activist to categorize people on the basis of their age.

The object of consideration in this case is language means used in Greta's speeches to categorize people according to their age.

To achieve the goal it is supposed to solve some tasks: to study and discuss the works on the problem of the "environmental discourse" notion determination; to study and discuss communicative strategies and linguistic means in Greta Thunberg's speeches.

2. Problem Statement

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, since the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, adopted in Stockholm on June 16, 1972, the scientific findings of ecological science become the subject of the wide public debate and begin to directly influence the nature of social studies. Geopolitical agreement on the need to solve the biological problems of the surrounding world and the problems of cultural development exists since the 1992 United Nations conference in Rio de Janeiro (Tsverianashvili, 2016). At its 19th plenary meeting, on 14 June 1992, the Conference adopted the Rio de Janeiro Declaration on Environment and Development, agenda for the 21st century, and a non-binding statement of principles for a global consensus on the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. As a result, a so-called "ecological" or "environmental consciousness", the main postulate of which is the awareness of the responsibility for changes in the environment, spreads all over the world (Bergmann, 2005).

Responsibility also becomes the main axiologeme of a new environmental discourse (Kurilova, 2013, p. 74). According to the researchers, an important role in the formation of environmental consciousness, passing through a variety of concepts and a variety of points of view, is played by this discourse (Filippova, 2018, p. 98). And this discourse, its pragmatics is a result of a new "discourse practice". That is why "new discourse practices that form in ever-changing social (and political) reality are of undeniable interest" (Issers, 2018, p. 657). As for the notion "discourse" we agree with the following:

The phenomenon of discourse is known to draw attention of philosophy, literary criticism, semiotics, social psychology as well as linguistics, namely, cognitive linguistics, cultural linguistics, psycholinguistics etc. Today at the modern stage of language studies there are different approaches considering this notion: analytical approaches (grammatical, pragmatic, rhetorical, stylistic, specific, conversational and semiotic analyses) <...> cognitive-discursive and communicative-discursive <...> (when) one should do a study of the cognitive aspects of communication which is highly relevant and at the same time introduce a discursive approach which enables to explore the construction of meanings in human interaction (Zelentsova, 2018, p. 777).

As a consequence, it is important to understand what makes the modern leader of ecological discourse speeches that powerful, if those speeches possess any linguistic features that make them so influential.

Thus the article tackles the problem of the language means used in Greta's speeches to categorize people according to their age. To solve this problem it is supposed to fulfil a linguistic survey of the communicative strategies and tactics, the stylistic devices and expressive means, metaphoric representation of the Friend – Foe category in Greta Thunberg's speeches.

3. Research Questions

The main questions of the article are formulated as follows:

Q 1. Do Greta Thunberg's speeches fall into the frame of the environmental discourse?

Q 2. What are the communicative strategies and tactics of persuasion and their linguistic realisation in Greta Thunberg's speeches?

Q 3. What are the linguistic means of age categorization in Greta Thunberg's speeches?

3.1. Environmental discourse principles of definition

Environmental discourse is considered by various researchers at two levels:

- the micro level (academic discourse proper, i.e. scientific findings on the questions of nature, environmental crisis and ecology problems solution);
- the macro level (publicist texts, "green speeches", political speeches, fiction texts and documentaries etc. on the problems of environment) (Aznacheeva, 2006; Filippova, 2018; Ivanova, 2007; Kurilova, 2013; Kurochkina, 2018; Mamonova & Kron, 2018).

Bergmann (2005) suggests that study of modern environmental discourse should also take into consideration the following aspects:

- cultural and historical perspective;
- natural science point of view;
- philosophical point of view;
- aesthetic point of view;
- sociopolitical position

From the point of view of functional and stylistic differentiation, as noted by Ivanova (2007), it is necessary to distinguish the following types of ecological discourse:

- scientific discourse;
- media discourse
- religious and preaching discourse;
- fiction discourse (p. 136).

Like any other, ecological discourse has a field structure. In the centre are those genres that contribute to the main purpose of discourse, so the core of ecological discourse will be scientific discourse as "the most appropriate to the goals, values and social functions of the discourse, as well as having the greatest number of links with the texts of other varieties of this discourse" (Aznacheeva, 2006, p. 83).

3.2. Communicative strategies and tactics of persuasion and their linguistic realisation

According to Larson (1992), all means of persuasion associated with the interpretation of an event, situation, or image can ultimately be represented by two cognitive strategies:

- to intensify,
- to downplay.

Their essence lies in the volume of the amount of information submitted about a particular object of reality.

The first strategy focuses on FOES shortcomings and the speaker's merits. Thus for FRIENDS it is an act of promotion, namely the exaggeration of merits, while for FOES it is an act of demotion, because their flaws are exaggerated and their dignity is denigrated. Hyperbole, parallelism and repetition can be attributed to the linguistic means of intensification together with epithets and attributive constructions.

The downplay is the strategy of FRIENDS' shortcomings concealment as well as FOES virtues concealment. This effect is achieved by concealing some aspects undesirable to the speaker (Larson, 1992).

3.3. Linguistic means of age categorization

The modern English speaking Mass Media show a tendency of shifting the focus to stir and fear-mongering by describing objects, situations, events, and political leaders from the “foe” block as frightening, potentially dangerous, causing a state of extreme anxiety for our (“friend”) future (Chanysheva, 2019, p. 225). The “Friend – Foe” opposition is revealed through conceptual metaphors in environmental discourse. It also provides assessment of the object of speech and categorizes it (Krasilnikova, 2007, p. 7). At the same time there is a need to analyse the main themes and repertoires of socio-cultural interaction raised in the discourse under study.

4. Purpose of the Study

As studies show Greta Thunberg's speeches are a call to fight, to fight for the preservation of life on Earth, against extinction, and at the same time against the existing political system (Karnyushina, 2019, p. 105). This study aims to identify linguistic features of age categorization in Greta Thunberg's speeches. The goal is achieved through the speeches' interpretation repertoires and cognitive analysis of her discourse. Communicative study provides this survey with extra-linguistic data for interpretation of the strategies.

5. Research Methods

For the study of G. Thunberg's speeches, the interpretation method of repertoires by J. Potter and M. Wetherell. According to Rusakova (2008), “repertoires of interpretations for categorizing others” (p. 10) belong to a synthetic approach in discourse analysis. In this regard, the process of creating “identity” is revealed through the category of “positioning”, the process by which people form an opinion about themselves in the course of interaction and negotiations with other people. “People who participate in interaction with each other are considered in three ways: 1) as products of certain discourses; 2) as creators of discourses; 3) as agents of socio-cultural reproduction and change” (Rusakova, 2008, p. 11).

The methodology of discourse analysis of this study defines discourse as the interpretations repertoires – that is, as “a set of possible sequences of statements in specific situational, temporal, cultural and institutional frameworks” (Rusakova, 2008, p. 12).

6. Findings

Within the framework of the considered theories, the following three main repertoire categories can be distinguished in Greta Thunberg’s speeches: ecology, politics, and children versus adults. There are also five subcategories: future, change, rebellion, money, and power.

This article presents the main findings as answers to the three research questions.

6.1. Environmental discourse

Greta Thunberg’s (2019) speeches possess all the features of an environmental discourse:

In particular, the theme of ecology is expressed by its main axiologeme:

- RESPONSIBILITY: e.g., “the bigger your platform – the bigger your responsibility; the bigger your carbon footprint – the bigger your moral duty” (p. 24)

Adults (politicians, influencers, rich companies) are responsible for the poor state of the environment, this category includes the mention of agreements and agreements: Paris Agreement, Kyoto Protocol, which responsible adults and politicians do not sign. The category of “responsibility” can be traced in all speeches, but there is an obvious division of responsibility into two other categories: “our” responsibility and “their” responsibility.

All speeches have a core subject, namely:

- CLIMATE SCIENCE

References to scientific researchers are given to confirm her own beliefs, indicating that the ecology problem solution has already been given by scientists (climate scientist Johan Rockström). Some references are used to support facts, quickly mention qualitative and quantitative data, e.g. “15 per cent every day”, “to stay below a 2°C warming target”, “to aim for 1.5°C”, “extra 0.5-1.1°C guaranteed”, “reduction of our CO₂ emissions by at least 50 per cent”, “prevent a 1.5°C of warming” (Thunberg, 2019).

Information about scientific data in all speeches precedes the call to act:

- SOCIOPOLITICAL POSITION

“The rules have to be changed” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 24) says Greta Thunberg in her Declaration of Rebellion on October, 31 2018. Her speeches have a clear address – to those who are to blame, and to those who are to act and rebel.

6.2. Communicative strategies and tactics of influence and their linguistic realisation

The category “politics” which is distinguished according to the repertoires of interpretations research method is expressed by:

- rhetorical devices – repetitions of conditional and subjunctive syntactic constructions (47 sentences with *if* clauses: *if people knew, if you still, if our house* etc, 32 sentences with *would*: *as you would in a crisis* etc.);
- the description of “some people” unaware of the present ecology crisis;
- the denial of her activity as political (*our school strike has nothing to do with party politics*);
- description of politicians as liars (*empty politics – empty words, the politics needed are nowhere in sight, we need new politics* etc),
- the word politics which is mentioned 11 times in 7 speeches: *Our lives are in your hands, Almost everything is black and white, Our house is on fire, You’re acting like spoiled, irresponsible children, A strange world, Cathedral thinking, Can you hear me?*

Moreover this category implies two opposing parties. The “Friend – Foe” opposition is revealed through the following conceptual metaphors:

WE – ORDINARY PEOPLE (children, autistic people, rich countries):

“those of us who are still children” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 4); “we children shouldn’t have to do this”; “our future is at risk” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 33), “children can’t change”, “if a few children can get headlines” (Thunberg, 2019, pp. 4, 12, etc.); “we are facing a disaster” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 20); “if people knew” (Thunberg, 2019, pp. 1, 2 etc.); “a lot of/some people say” (Thunberg, 2019, pp. 4, 11 etc.), “all we have to do is to wake up and change” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 11); “imagine what we all could do together” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 14); “we know that most politicians don’t want to talk to us” (Thunberg, 2019, 35); “we autistic are the normal ones” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 7).

THEY – POLITICIANS (influencers, rich companies, media):

“politicians that ridicule us on social media”; “even green politicians fly and eat meat”; “we know that most politician don’t want to talk to us”, “political parties that pretend to take the climate question seriously”, “what do we do when politics are nowhere in sight?” (Thunberg, 2019); “we know that most politicians don’t want to talk to us. Good, we don’t want to talk to them” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 35); “they will be remembered as the greatest villains” “we know that most politicians don’t want to talk to us” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 37); “will continue to drill for oil”, “the expansion of its North Sea oil and gas fields”; “to set their economic goals aside” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 18); “And someone is to blame! Some people – some companies, some decision-makers” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 17); “where celebrities, film and pop stars <...> will not stand up or our environment” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 43).

At the same time, there is an implementation of persuasion tactics by the usage of the following categorization:

WE – PUPPETS (“call us puppets, who cannot think” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 35))

WE – ACTION (change, rebel, strike, panic, fight).

THEY – LIE (“make up conspiracies” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 35); “buy their own truth” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 43))

THEY – GUILT (“Everyone’s guilty – no one is to blame. And someone is to blame! Some people – some companies, some decision-makers” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 17).

6.3. Linguistic means of age categorization

The category “people” in Greta Thunberg’s speeches is revealed through the lexemes *children*, *generations*, *adults* (“I sound and act like an adult” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 31), “doing this to wake the adults” (Thunberg, 2019, 68), “adults keep saying we owe it to young generations” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 24)), *they* and *people* (“People keep doing what they do” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 24)) etc. (Table 1).

Table 01. Lexical representation of the category PEOPLE

People	Children	Politicians	Adults	Media	Generations
57	37	11	3	6	5

According to Table 1 the semantic field “people” is mostly represented by the words “people” and “children”. In some cases Greta identifies herself with “people”, but always – with “children” and “future generation”, once she identified herself as an “adult”. But we can divide this field into two opposites “children” and “adults”. The group CHILDREN comprises of the lexemes “children” and “generations”. Whereas ADULTS comprises of all the cases of the usage of the lexemes “people”, “politicians”, “media”, “adults” and some other words like “celebrities” and “influencers”. The lexemes “we”, “they”, “you”, “I” are not included as it requires a separate study. This data suggests that Greta Thunberg’s speeches are mostly about adults.

Children in the speeches are those who have done their homework (Thunberg, 2019, p. 34), they are striking for the climate, for their future, they are the “generation to clean up and solve” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 39). Children are performed as a power, as those who know better and fight. Moreover, children of the future are the judges (“they will ask about you why you didn’t do anything” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 15)).

Adults are of two types: those who are unaware of the crisis – “the vast majority doesn’t have a clue” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 10), and those who are responsible – “And someone is to blame! Some people – some companies, some decision-makers” (Thunberg, 2019, p. 17).

This categorization performs an opposition of responsible, active and wise children and irresponsible, venal, or infantile adults.

7. Conclusion

Studying the communicative strategies used by Greta Thunberg to realize her intentions aimed at the persuasion to raise awareness in the climate crisis, namely strategies to intensify (performed by various rhetorical devices) and to downplay (performed by metaphors and other linguistic means), helps to explain what repertoires and language techniques are the most effective in the modern environmental discourse.

Summing it up the current study has demonstrated the relevance of the goal to study environmental discourse in its present style. Thus today it is performed by a globally supported leader – teenager-activist, which is new in both – the age and the problem raised.

The research methods proved to be effective to demonstrate the results and find out the most common speech strategies of communicative intention of persuasion in Greta Thunberg’s speeches. The results showed that in the course of the discourse in question, the speaker mostly used linguistic means that helped to persuade, thus having implemented the effect achieved. Moreover, the study showed the

importance of further investigation in order to explain how communicative intentions are received by its targets and thus how and why it may succeed (or fail) as a form of persuasion and influence. As a perspective, it is also necessary to explore the phonetic and visual potential of speech influence in the proposed material.

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