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Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding

POLITICAL PERSUASIVENESS: USAGE OF METAPHORS IN AMERICAN PRESIDENTS' SPEECHES

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Abstract

In all political systems leaders pay attention to the word as an object with which help a process of persuasion takes place. The peculiarity of a political language is that because of its special environment and due to the orientation of the political communication on the mass audience the political language lacks corporationism inherent to any special language; moreover, it has a ritual nature which determines language means allowing in definite borders (but figuratively and effectively) to advance its position. Political rhetoric most often uses a publicistic style widely spread in mass media. In its basis there is a function of impact being transformed in the function of persuasion so a political speech can be referred to the argumentative, suggestive type of a communicative process. Persuasion is communication which is aimed at having an impact on beliefs, viewpoints, opinions and behavior of a receiver of the message. The analysis of famous speeches by two American presidents representing two epochs – Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama allowed us to conclude that metaphor is a very effective means in updating intuitive ethical, emotionally charged mental schemes as a result of which potential leaders communicating with an audience draw the attention to those aspects of the topics which can affect a group. By using figurative means a person has an implicit aim to affect a reader or a listener in a certain way.

Keywords: Dialogue, figurative means, persuasion, metaphor, political discourse, political rhetoric.

1. Introduction

Mass media discourse represents a channel by means of which flows of information and communicative activities can be transferred in a centralized from to various target audiences which are located in different places and are of different social and political status. Mass media take an integral part in receiving and delivering information to people (Benamara et al., 2018; Katermina, 2018).

Thanks to mass media discourse (in our case political mass media discourse) different points of view, values and beliefs can be formed. It is political mass media discourse that is in charge of people's viewpoints, thoughts and convictions, their picture of the world. By means of this kind of discourse audience can communicate and share their thoughts and expectations.

The dialogical aspect becomes the main feature of discourse combining individual and social characteristics: from this position both the production of discourse by the speaking subject and the social context are relevant. An analysis of the social functioning of discourse solves the important problem of realizing social interaction in the linguistic form, structure and process of linguistic creativity (Konovalova, 2019; Ponomarenko et al., 2017; Ridout, 2018).

Vocabulary is considered to be a very influential and effective way of convincing and persuading people by political leaders – not only the message itself is of particular interest but the way they say it, the means they use, the techniques they employ to achieve control and dominance.

2. Problem Statement

The language of politics is sometimes seen as an affiliation, a substyle of a mass media discourse. Mass media discourse correlates with a number of forms of public consciousness, reflects various spheres of communication including the sphere of politics, carrying out the function of influence – the most important for a political language. The use of political vocabulary can be successful only if it is consistent with the political culture – a set of shared ideas about the world of politics, common patterns of thinking, perception and activity that are institutionalized in the iconic systems of the sociocultural community (Zheltukhina et al., 2016; 2017; 2018).

The impact of figurative units in political mass media discourse is a valuable set of ideas about a linguistic personality that has historically developed within the national culture as a result of a generalization of various aspects of value orientations – moral, ethical, aesthetic, pragmatic attitudes and norms. Their analysis allows us to penetrate deep into the national linguistic consciousness and study fragments of the worldview of the linguistic personality of a politician (Heyvaert et al., 2020; Plaksin et al., 2018).

3. Research Questions

1. What is the role of political communication in political discourse?
2. How do the linguistic means used by politicians work out?
3. How does suggestion influence the target audience?

4.   Purpose of the Study

The use of metaphors and their effect in political mass media discourse as applied to a person consists not only in revealing expressive and emotional nuances of a word's meaning through contexts of different volumes but also in updating the corresponding system of generally accepted associations in a given linguistic system.

The article exhibits different ways to describe the choice of metaphorical units to influence the deep processes of human cognition based on the speeches of two American presidents of the XXth and XXIst centuries.

5.   Research Methods

A comprehensive study is based on the application of a combination of theory and methodology of several areas of scientific knowledge: linguistic-discursive analysis, medialinguistic method, interpretative analysis.

Discursive analysis is aimed at showing the context in publicistic style – in its oral and written varieties. This kind of analysis studies relations between language and processes going on in the society thus allowing the speaker and listener interact in a successful way. Within the framework of the media linguistic approach, the methodology for analyzing media texts is characterized by a stable system of parameters which allows an extremely accurate description of a particular media text A central category of media linguistics is media text which is considered to be a discrete unit of mass media discourse.

Interpretative analysis is aimed at understanding the internal content of the interpreted object through the study of its external manifestations.

6.   Findings

To convince a person, it is necessary to weave inspired ideas into the context of his worldview positions. Suggestion is a very complex phenomenon especially if a person is opposed, or has firm convictions and is inflexible in terms of adopting a point of view that does not coincide with his own or he takes very seriously any information given to him. Politicians make a lot of efforts to "circumvent" the defense mechanisms of the audience in order to ensure the truth of their statements. To convince a person, it is necessary to weave inspired ideas into the context of his worldview positions, since people are not inclined to trust something new but easily accept postulates that coincide with what they already believe in. Suggestion through assimilation of the ideas presented with the opinion of the addressee is well used in politics by means of metaphors which reflect archetypical representations of man (Volskaya et al., 2017). Metaphor does not introduce anything new into the context but actualizes the background knowledge and subconscious representations of the audience, since the interpretation of the metaphor is a purely personal process expressed by the politician; what was said becomes the listener's inner voice and so metaphors can be called the carriers of affective values (Tameryan et al., 2018; Solmaz, 2014; Way 2019).

Metaphor is a challenge to (linguistic) consciousness which requires from the recipient (listener, reader) to make certain efforts to decipher the meaning and justify the coincidence of the meanings and associations of the signified phenomena. Politicians have already understood that the choice of metaphors

– peaceful, constructive, unifying, aimed at cooperation in a team – depends on the future of a particular politician, nation, or even the whole geopolitical situation as a whole. Political metaphor is characterized by the presence of a powerful classifying image, its generalization to the degree of a symbol, the presence of a deep information layer of the culture and historical background as well as its political motivation (Musolff, 2016).

The political language of different cultures (Russian, Austro-German, Anglo-American) of the XXth – XXIst centuries is strongly metaphorized. Metaphor forms a model of perception of reality. Political metaphors being a figurative expression of politicians' not fully conscious desires and intentions not only reveal their hidden intentions but also form a certain way of thinking and actions in the audience (Charteris-Black, 2018).

The speeches of all the politicians are full of figurative means –

The analysis of the speech of the American President Ronald Reagan (Remarks at the National Association of Evangelicals…), known as the "Evil Empire", has suggested that the appeal to the family values of religion is an important means of the truth of his statements in religious America. Following the commandments is the cornerstone of the piety and greatness of the American people – bedrock of America's goodness and greatness, all the trials the Lord sends are blessings that are humbly accepted (here and further on the italicized words and expressions are the quotations from the speeches of American Presidents), traditional values, they are the commandments of the Lord at the same time, – the key to spiritual awakening and renewal.

The antagonists of true values – atheists of the communist Soviet Union, the embodiment of the devil himself – adversaries – living in the disgusting lair of crime – sordid dens of crime – violated the commandment of the Lord and elevated themselves to the level of God The USSR is hostility (attacks on the sacredness of human life), pretence and tyranny and, worst of all, denial of eternal values (many attempts to water down traditional values and even abrogate the original terms of American democracy). The confrontation between the USA and the USSR is a battle between Good and Evil and since faith is the key to prosperity and greatness and atheism is the path to hell, the USA has every reason to pacify communist tyranny for the goodness of the world.

In other words, this is precisely the purpose of the metaphor in political rhetoric – to consolidate the speaker's position as a legitimate source of power by inspiring trust in the addressee by choosing the "right words".

Metaphor is quite aggressive and ruthless, in the sense that it excludes from the set of political ideas and ideas all the meanings that are inherent in it which is difficult to remove or replace after it has taken root in. That's why the image of the Soviet Union as an empire of evil – the evil empire – actually hell on earth, has been firmly entrenched in the minds of foreigners for many years along with other stereotypical ideas about the Soviet people.

This finds echoes in the context of the political crisis in modern political reality. The battle between Good and Evil continues.

According to Barack Obama (Remarks by the President in address to European Youth Brussels…), the First and Second World Wars, the Holocaust, like the rest of the lessons that we can read in the cemeteries of the continent are not seen by the enemy named Russia that captured Crimea.

Russia is a barbarian power ruled by an autocrat – an all-powerful sovereign, therefore the United States takes care of building democracy where people cannot cope on their own being crushed by the ruling regime.

Russia is a "bully". Because it has brute force and does not possess human dignity, it bullies the weak. It has dared to such an extent that it violates international law – ...assault on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia behaves like a fascist but accuses the United States. The United States takes the share of the burden of protecting the rights of the weak and the ideas on which the modern world is based. This is a solemn oath (of the knight before the crusade) from which the United States will not depart – uphold our solemn obligation … to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our allies.

And to this mission to protect ideals and human dignity and opportunity, America is calling for others to join – invest in our collective defense, united in defense of these ideals, it can guarantee peace and security around the world, and this is what, rather than infringement on the rights of the weak, is strength.

It was the cleansing fire of the revolution that helped the people from Africa to India threw off the yoke of colonialism to secure their independence, not violence, not weapons, but a (divine) spark of ideals of morality and equality, which the USA bestowed upon people, gave an end to the Berlin Wall and liberated the peoples of Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia – for decades, this vision stood in sharp contrast to life on the other side of an Iron Curtain. For decades, a contest was waged, and ultimately that contest was won – not by tanks and missiles, but because our ideals stirred the hearts of Hungarians who sparked a revolution; Poles in their shipyards who stood in Solidarity; Czechs who waged a Velvet Revolution without firing a shot; and East Berliners who marched past the guards and finally tore down that wall.

Thus, the United States is both the big brother who defends the weak and gives the saving fire the Titan, and the knight who takes the oath before the crusade. The goodness and legitimacy of intentions and actions is undeniable. And the USA makes a solemn commitment to fight to the bitter end.

Politicians quite often use "successful" metaphors created by their predecessors which become generally accepted because of their laconicism and capacity. Examples such as "evil empire", "the Iron Curtain", "Iron Lady" are not the only, but perhaps the most striking examples whose suggestive function is undeniable.

7. Conclusion

The given analysis of very famous speeches by two American presidents representing two epochs – Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama – led us to the following conclusions:

1. Political discourse is a communicative activity that assumes the background knowledge of its participants, their expectations, motives, taking into account the political views of both parties as well as the political situation as a whole and aimed at gaining and maintaining political power.

2. Politicians strive not only to inspire the masses with their point of view but to visualize the reality in the way that is seen in their perspective and understood by all the people. Some techniques constitute the basis of a manipulative effect and such techniques are used by politicians in general and political leaders in particular. Metaphorical means play a great role in this task.

3. Figurative means and metaphor among them evaluate and assess moral standards of the society. They become an axiological tool since a vital characteristic of this stylistic device is the possibility to change the way people assess the reality. At the same time metaphors serve as a means to regulate people's behavior.

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