

TILTM 2020**Topical Issues of Linguistics and Teaching Methods in Business and Professional Communication****DISCOURSE STRATEGY OF MELIORATION OF THE RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY**

Natalia Med (a)*

*Corresponding author

(a) Saint Petersburg State University, Universitetskaya nab. 7/9, Saint Petersburg, Russia, n.med@spbu.ru

Abstract

The article has been written in the framework of scientific research project Language Modeling of the Image of Russia in the Ibero-American Media and deals with the reaction of the Ibero-American media to the key foreign-policy events of 2019-2020 and the analysis of language devices of discourse strategy of melioration of the Russian external policies. Topicality of the research question is conditioned by the fact that tactics and language manipulative devices which target the mainstream audience in Spanish-speaking political discourse have been poorly studied so far. The article uses comprehensive methodology which includes both linguistic analysis (semantic, contextual and stylistic) and methods of related sciences (CDA, linguopolitical, method of comparative historic assessment) aimed at defining a positive reaction to the Russian foreign policy. The study has been conducted through the lens of the argumentation theory widely used for the analysis of various discourse practices. Among lexical devices of the discourse strategy of melioration the most frequently used ones are self-explanatory headings, evaluative language, phraseological devices, modern coinages, precedent phenomena, which form a positive image of the country and its leader. Among positive goal-oriented substantiation of evaluations are Russia's successful policies in the Middle East, selfless aid of Russia to Italy and other countries in their fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis of language devices used in Spanish-speaking readers' commentary to articles in the Ibero-American media, which interpret the Russian image in a negative way, mostly demonstrates the discourse strategy of melioration of the image of Russia and its leader.

2357-1330 © 2020 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Ibero-American media, the image of Russia, Russian foreign policy, argumentation theory, discourse strategy of melioration, language representation.



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

1. Introduction

A country's image is usually understood as specific notional associations based on the whole of rational and emotional stereotypical concepts of the country, including knowledge of historical facts, specific features of the national character, lifestyle, culture, involvement in the international political processes, which form public opinion to achieve the desired result. The media impact on the public opinion has an emotional component which promotes representation of a positive or negative image of the country. Thus, modeling the country's image is usually based on the information delivered in the form of two discourse strategies: melioration and pejoration. The study has revealed that the main parameters of positive or negative modeling of the image of Russia in the Ibero-American media are extra-linguistic factors, i.e. political, economic and cultural ties between Russia and the Ibero-American countries, as well as relations between these countries and the US and the EU, which condition the reaction of the Ibero-American countries to the Russian foreign policy. It should be noted that the analysis of language devices of representation of the image of Russia and its foreign policy image in particular, based on the material of Spanish-speaking media, has been conducted for the first time. The existing studies in the Russian linguistics have been held mostly basing on the material of English-speaking and German-speaking media (Alyoshina, 2015; Khazieva, 2018; Kostina, 2015; Maximova, 2016 etc). Thus, the main objective of this study is to define the basic mechanisms of creating a positive reaction to the Russian foreign policy within the framework of the language argumentation theory.

2. Problem Statement

Evaluativity is one of the main characteristic features of media discourse and an essential element of discourse strategies aimed at creating either positive or negative image of the country. The study mostly focuses on the analysis of types of evaluative meanings and goal-oriented substantiation of evaluations in verbal representation of the Russian foreign policy.

3. Research Questions

Study of the mass media language is most efficiently held in the framework of discourse analysis, i.e. studying media text taking into consideration extra-linguistic (pragmatic, historical, psychological, sociocultural and other) factors, which allows to find out evaluation attitudes, metaphorical models and stereotypes which form a certain ideology (Van Dijk, 2013, pp. 120-125). Argumentation theory in CDA is widely used to study various discourse practices. According to Pocheptsov (2001), argumentation is a "social, intellectual, verbal activity needed to justify or confute an opinion; it consists of a set of statements and is aimed at securing the audience's approval" (p.113–114). In his book *Objetivo Moscú: protagonistas de la obsesión antirrusa*, published in 2019, Couso Permuy (2019), a former MEP (2014-2019), successively analyses the actions of public officials in the US, Europe and Spain aimed at discrediting Russia in the context of Ukrainian events and annexation of Crimea, which provoke global anti-Russian hysteria so as to isolate Russia from Europe and establish the US global hegemony. Reiterating the leading role of the US and European media in promoting this hysteria, Couso Permuy states that most influential Spanish media eagerly took part in this campaign spreading rumours of a probable military aggression on

the part of Russia and blaming it for information warfare (p.90). The image of Russia and its leader in the Ibero-American media being controversial, it seems important to define language devices of discourse strategy of melioration with the help of CDA.

4. Purpose of the Study

Analysis of language devices of discourse strategies of melioration in the Ibero-American media, its evaluative component and goal-oriented substantiation of evaluations is the aim of this study.

5. Research Methods

The study applies comprehensive methodology based on linguistic analysis (semantic, contextual and stylistic) as well as methods of related sciences (CDA, linguopolitical, method of comparative historic assessment).

6. Findings

Among most widely used devices of melioration strategy are self-explanatory headings, evaluative language, phraseological devices, modern coinages, precedent phenomena, which form a positive image of the country and its leader.

A heading plays a special role in attracting attention and forming a popular opinion. Thus, for instance, the heading of an Argentinean newspaper “Putin, con un oído en el pueblo y otro en el mundo” (<https://www.tiempoar.com.ar/nota/putin-con-un-oido-en-el-pueblo-y-otro-en-el-mundo>) allows to conclude at once that the Russian President is able to stay in tune with both the Russians’ opinion and the global situation. The heading of a Mexican newspaper “Putin, nuevo hombre fuerte de Oriente Medio tras huida de Trump” (<https://www.elmonitoredomex.com/post/putin-nuevo-hombre-fuerte-de-oriente-medio-tras-huida-de-trump>) indicates not only the growing influence of Russia and its leader on the policies in the Middle East, but the failure of the US policies in the region as well.

An essential part of discourse strategies is the category of evaluation. Kolshansky (1975) rightly remarks that “evaluation is everywhere, where a knower in any way comes into contact with the real world” (p. 142). Pragmatics of verbal communication, evaluation being an integral part of it, is related on the one hand to the subject who voices his or her attitude to some object of the real life, and on the other hand, the recipient, who reacts to an utterance with an evaluative component targets. Evaluative component’s potential to cause a certain recipient’s reaction is widely used in political discourse as a means of persuasion.

The analysis of the material of the Ibero-American media allows to define a number of positive evaluative meanings in the Russian leader’s characteristics:

1. General positive evaluation: “el mejor líder mundial; el líder mundial más carismático, (<https://alaligera.com/vladimir-putin/>); “<...> es un líder culto, carismático, valiente, con los pies bien puestos sobre las tierra, un orgullo para el pueblo Ruso. A diferencia de Trump, que es una vergüenza para el pueblo estadounidense” (Voiku, 2019, p.75).

2. Positive intellectual evaluation: “Putin es un político sagaz, intuitivo, gran estratega y estadista reconocido a nivel mundial, que maneja brillantemente los tiempos políticos y conoce a su pueblo” (<https://www.tiempoar.com.ar/nota/putin-con-un-oido-en-el-pueblo-y-otro-en-el-mundo>).
3. Language devices which contain the semantic component of “power” are widely used in the material studied (hombre fuerte, hombre viril, hombre invencible), which forms a positive image of the Russian leader (Zernova, 2019, p. 99-100).

An important aspect of the argumentation theory is target-oriented substantiation of evaluations. In particular, “target-oriented substantiation of a positive evaluation of a certain object is a reference to the fact that with the help of this object another object may be gained, the latter being of positive value” (Ivin, 2019,p.180). The Ibero-American media being by and large negative towards the Russian foreign policy, it is impossible not to point to target-oriented substantiation of the country’s image melioration. Thus, in a number of articles this target-oriented substantiation is Russia’s successful policy and de-escalation of the conflict in the Middle East: “Rusia emerge como principal agente político en el conflicto de Siria, negociando con Irán y Turquía”.

(<https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2019/10/20/5dab1df621efa0dd6f8b4576.html>)

La retirada de las tropas de Estados Unidos de Siria, ordenada de forma precipitada por el presidente Donald Trump, confirma no sólo el creciente aislacionismo de la primera potencia, sino el rol creciente de Rusia en la esfera internacional y el papel cada vez más protagónico del presidente Vladimir Putin (<https://www.elmonitoredomex.com/post/putin-nuevo-hombre-fuerte-de-orient-medio-tras-huida-de-trump>); “Medio Oriente <...> se fue inclinando hacia Moscú, Rusia también se acercó a Egipto, <...> se convirtió en un actor crucial en la guerra civil en Libia”.

(<https://www.lanacion.com.ar/el-mundo/el-juego-de-rusia-un-ano-en-el-que-el-mundo-bailo-al-ritmo-de-putin-nid2318435>)

Russia’s influence on the international policy is recognized even by those who hold a negative stance in respect of our country: “A Rusia no se la quiere, pero cuando hay que resolver problemas globales, como la crisis de Corea del Norte o el contencioso nuclear con Irán, sí se descuelga el teléfono para hablar con Moscú”

(<https://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20191229/472590808190/vladimir-putin-poder-kremlin-rusia.html>).

Discourse strategy of melioration of the Russian leader’s image manifests itself in readers’ comments in respect of the negative slant as well, where the target-oriented substantiation of a positive evaluation are arguments which explicate such qualities of the Russian President as responsibility, self-consistency, independent policy, in contrast to the political stance taken by the EU countries: “El mundo necesita como agua dirigentes como Putin. No ya por su innegable sentido de estado y responsabilidad, sino por decir las cosas claras y actuar en consecuencia; Ojalá España tuviera uno, dejaría de arrastrarse por las letrinas globalistas como un peón para reclamar su sitio en el mundo; <...>expresar mi admiración

a un político con un par de testículos como Putin” (Med, 2019, p.154-156). Colloquial phraseological units, such as “necesitar como agua” and “con un par de testículos” (to be brave) accentuate positive evaluation of argumentation in the commentary. Embedding words of modern coinage in the text may also promote positive evaluation; for instance, the use of the non-assimilated English coinage “cuckold/anticuckold” in respect of Russia: “Rusia ha demostrado que se puede vencer al globalismo, es un ejemplo para todo el mundo. Rusia es el país anticuckold por excelencia, ni siquiera la izquierda es progre en ese país. En España al contrario, no ser cuckold se considera delito de odio” (Med 2019, p. 156). Lexical unit “cuckold” means the ‘husband of an adulterous wife’. In a broader sense this term can mean a person aware of and reconciled to their partner's infidelity. Thus, the reader compares Spain to a reconciled partner deceived by everyone around (meaning the EU and the US policies), while Russia is not willing to be deceived and acts on its own.

The aid rendered by Russia to Italy and other countries to help fight the COVID-19 pandemic is a subject of a heated debate in the Ibero-American media and is reflected in the eye-catching headings: “Bulos, aviones y el fin de la Unión Europea: la propaganda de Putin golpea donde duele” (https://www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/2020-04-03/rusia-union-europea-propaganda-putin_2531351/); “Putin ayuda a Occidente a la espera del levantamiento de sanciones” (https://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/Putin-Occidente-espera-levantamiento-sanciones_0_1013149044.html), which *a priori* exclude Russia's selfless desire to help the countries struggling with the pandemic, while target-oriented substantiation of the negative evaluation of Russia's aid is Putin's aspiration to either dismember the EU or have the sanctions lifted. The message “From Russia with love” on the Russian planes which flew the humanitarian aid and medical virologists is ironically played with in a heading of a Spanish newspaper, which considers this aid a geopolitical tool: “¿De Rusia con amor? El dilema de la ayuda como instrumento geopolítico” (<https://www.elespectador.com/coronavirus/de-rusia-con-amor-el-dilema-de-la-ayuda-como-instrumento-geopolitico-articulo-912703>). The analysis of readers' comments shows active opposition to such manipulation. Especially indignant were the Ibero-American readers after an article published in the leading Italian newspaper “La Stampa” on 26 March 2020, in which the Russian assistance was called useless and dangerous, as well as an interview of E.Macron, the French President, who on 28 March 2020 expressed his regrets that the media were more eager to cover the Russian and Chinese aid to Italy than the EU assistance. The article and the interview were reprinted in the Spanish-speaking media, and in the RT news as well, which resulted in a wave of readers' comment, in which the key positive evaluation words were “amistad, amor, ayuda, solidaridad”, in contrast to negative evaluations in respect of newspapers' political orientation and inaction of the EU, the key words there being “ingratitude, egoísmo, criminales, perros falderos de EU”. For instance, in one comment (reprinted with the original spelling) the reader uses a phraseological unit and grapheme non-verbal expressive devices (the use of capital letters) for argumentation, substantiating their conclusions with corruption of the media which in their thirst for breaking news and profits are biting the hand that feeds them:

El número de muertos por el coronavirus Covid-19 en Italia es el más alto del mundo. Sin embargo, un importante periódico italiano ha declarado que la ayuda rusa es un pretexto para que Putin envíe a sus militares al territorio de la OTAN, calificándolo en su mayoría de «inútil» contra la pandemia. NO FALTAN MEDIOS SENSACIONALISTAS QUE CON EL AFAN DE VENDER SUS PERIODICOS

DICEN DE TODO Y HASTA MUERDEN LA MANO DE QUIEN LES AYUDA, SERIA BUENO QUE LA OTAN AYUDARA EN EL CONTROL DE ESE VIRUS (<https://es.news-front.info/2020/03/26/ingratitude-principal-periodico-de-italia-califica-de-inutil-la-ayuda-de-rusia-contr-el-covid-19-y-dice-que-el-presidente-putin-usa-la-mision-medica-para-la-exploracion-militar/>).

Besides grapheme expressive devices in the comment to E.Macron's interview, the reader uses the "Liberty, equality, fraternity" motto of the French Revolution, which, in their opinion, sounds outdated now, and makes use of precedent names of the great French philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment – Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau- who would definitely roll over in their graves seeing such inactivity and hypocrisy of France and other EU countries: "...LIBERTAD, IGUALDAD y SOLIDARIDAD hoy son meros garabatos archivados en viejas bibliotecas..Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau...deben estar revolcándose en sus tumbas" (<https://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/347911-macron-francia-esta-ayudar-italia-tener-cuidado-ayuda-rusia>). These comments demonstrate the failure of the manipulation tactics, which shows the mainstream audience they target often has other evaluative substantiations in their discourse tactics, in this case oriented at melioration of the image of Russia and its leader.

7. Conclusion

The study allows to conclude that the discourse strategy of melioration is poorly represented in the coverage of the foreign policy of Russia in the Ibero-American media since the end of 2019 to the early 2020 and is realized only in respect of Russia's success in reconciling the conflicts in the Middle East and assistance to other countries in their fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The discourse strategy of melioration is a set of language devices aimed at certain illocutionary goals which promote the positive evaluation of Russia's image.

Acknowledgments

The article has been produced in the framework of scientific project N. 19-012-00387 with support from The Russian Foundation for Basic Research.

References

- Alyoshina, E. Y. (2015). *Publichnyy politicheskiy diskurs konfliktnoy situatsii* [Public Political Discourse of the Conflict Situation]. Prometey. [in Rus.]
- Couso Permuy, J (2019). *Objetivo Moscú: protagonistas de la obsesión antirrusa*. Parlamento Europeo, GUE/NGL.
- Ivin, A. A. (2019). *Argumentation in communication processes. Pro et contra* [Argumentatsiya v protsessakh kommunikatsii. Pro et contra]. Prospekt. [in Rus.]
- Khazieva, R. R. (2018). *Ispol'zovaniye lozhnoy informatsii v diskursivnom lingvopoliticheskom modelirovaniy deystvitel'nosti (na materiale angloyazychnykh konfliktogennykh tekstov)* [The use of fake information in discourse linguopolitical modeling of the reality (a case study of English-language conflict-generating texts)] (Doctoral Dissertation). Ufa. [in Rus.]
- Kolshansky, G. V. (1975). *The ratio of subjective and objective factors in the language* [Sootnosheniye sub'yektivnykh i ob'yektivnykh faktorov v yazyke]. Nauka. [in Rus.]
- Kostina, K. V. (2015). Linguistic peculiarities of representation of the image of Russia by the example of German video «Putins Russland»[Kostina K.V.Lingvisticheskiye osobennosti reprezentatsii obraza

- prezidenta Rossii na primere nemetskogo videosyuzheta «Putins Russland»]. *Vestnik Irkutskogo gosudarstvennogo tekhnicheskogo universiteta*, 5(100), 388-391. [in Rus.]
- Maximova, M. V. (2016). The role of English-language media in creating a linguistic portrait of Russia and Russians: an axiological aspect [Rol' angloyazychnykh SMI v sozdanii yazykovogo portreta Rossii i rossiyan: aksiologicheskii aspekt]. *Vestnik pedagogicheskogo opyta*, 37, 23-26. [in Rus.]
- Med, N. G. (2019). Presidential election 2018 in Russia: methods of speech manipulating in mass-media of Spain, Argentina and Peru [Prezidentskiye vybory 2018 v Rossii: priemy rechevogo manipulirovaniya v SMI Ispanii, Argentiny i Peru]. *Drevnyaya i Novaya Romaniya*, 23, 135-160. [in Rus.]
- Pocheptsov, G. G. (2001). *Theory of communication* [Teoriya kommunikatsii]. Vakler. [in Rus.]
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2013). *Discourse and power: Representation of dominance in language and communication*. Translation from English. [Van Deyk, T. Diskurs i vlast': reprezentatsiya dominirovaniya v yazyke i kommunikatsii (Per.s angl.). URSS. [in Rus.]
- Voiku, O. K. (2019). Analysis of the political discourse of Cuban press (on the material of campaign for the 2018 Russian President election) [Analiz politicheskogo diskursa kubinskoy pressy (na materiale vyborov prezidenta Rossiiskoy Federatsii v 2018 godu)]. *Drevnyaya i Novaya Romaniya*, 23, 66-78. [in Rus.]
- Zernova, E. S. (2019). Presidential elections in Russia as an object of information wave in the Mexican media discourse [Prezidentskie vybory v Rossii kak ob'ekt informatsionnoy volny v meksikanskom media diskurse]. *Drevnyaya i Novaya Romaniya*, 23, 94-109. [in Rus.]