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MODERN POLITICAL DISCOURSE: PHENOMENON OF THE RITUALIZATION

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Abstract

The article is devoted to revealing the elements of ritualization in modern political discourse. Real communicative acts of users of social network "Twitter" and speeches of D. Trump, B. Obama, V.V. Zhirinovsky, K.A. Sobchak act as the material of the research. The purpose of the research is achieved by the application of the descriptive-comparative method, method of definitional, lexical-semantical, stylistic and emotive analyses. The relevance of the research stems from the fact that modern media discourse provides political texts with a different degree of ritualism than the texts of the pre-internet period used to possess. The analysis of the material shows that speech ritual is an expected by the audience phenomenon of the language identity of the politician. It has a highly emotional form and contributes to maintaining the sense of integrity of the language personality of the politician. The authors conclude that modern highly ritualized text in political discourse has an aim to make the perception of the information easier by the mass audience and to anchor it as meaningful in the minds of the addressees. The most significant signs of high ritualization of the texts in political discourse, such as their high citation and response to them by the audience, are noted by the observers.

Keywords: Language identity of the politician, media discourse, political discourse, ritualization, speech ritual.

1. Introduction

Political theme maintains one of the leading roles in modern mass communication. "One of the most persuasive discourses is mass media discourse, and especially political one" (Boeva-Omelechko et al., 2019, p. 2). The political discourse is becoming more focused on mass effect, using non-obvious manipulative or close to manipulative technologies. "The public sphere of politics is accomplished in the form of speech, which ranges from controversy and revelations to proclamation and declaration" (Tameryan et al., 2018, p. 378). Nowadays, there is a number of terms that can describe the communicative features of the linguistic personality of a politician (Aleshchanova et al., 2018). The speech of a politician is "guessable", sometimes stereotypical, and the audience has certain expectations about some of its elements. The founder of the term "stereotype" is W. Lippman, who describes stereotypes as ordered, schematic culture-deterministic world pictures, reflected in a person's mind, that can help to minimise efforts in the perception of complex objects of the world. Maslova (2001), giving a definition of "stereotype", associates it with the term "ritual", comparing them as follows: "Stereotype is a type existing in the world, it measures activity, behaviour... Behaviour stereotypes can shift to rituals. Ritual always involves reflection regarding the meaning of its performance... Ritual is conditional" (pp. 44, 110). Moreover, the author mentions that ritual actions originally served as symbols, and the fact of knowing them showed the level of culture and the importance of personality in society. Karasik (2014) notes that "discursive personality... shows itself as someone who is recognizable and partly predictive due to his manner of behaviour...All communicative acts of such a personality are saturated with the symbolic meaning" (p. 182). Speech actions (in this case we do not mean speech acts) can be related to any actions through complex multilevel ritual indirect schemes: In modern linguistics, performance … relates to performing of theatrical or ritual speech actions (Luchinskaya & Sizonenko, 2013). Manifestations of the linguistic personality of a politician can be viewed as actions that have clear and implicit signs of ritualism. Not without a reason the term "ritual" occurs in a lot of linguistic works, and, in our opinion, is quite appropriate to describe some peculiarities of political discourse. Therefore, we propose to use the term "ritualization" concerning processes, taking place in political discourse.

2. Problem Statement

Ritualization as a feature of modern political texts has received little attention and requires a detailed study within the framework of media linguistics.

3. Research Questions

How do we understand the linguistic phenomenon of ritualization? Can we find out any dynamics of ritualization of texts in political discourse? What are the signs of high ritualization of the texts in political discourse?

4.   Purpose of the Study

The research is aimed at revealing the elements of ritualization in modern political discourse and describing speech ritual as a phenomenon of the language identity of the politician.

5.   Research Methods

The methodological framework of this research is the system approach. The purpose of the research is achieved by the application of the descriptive-comparative method, the method of definitional, lexical-semantical, stylistic and emotive analyses. Real communicative acts in social network "Twitter" and speeches by D. Trump, B. Obama, V.V. Zhirinovsky, K.A. Sobchak act as a material of the research.

6.   Findings

The ancient Roman speaker and politician Marcus Porcius Cato finished each of his public speeches with the appeal *"Carthage must be destroyed"* (Babichev & Borovskoj, 1982). These words have become a catchphrase, meaning a call to fight. In ancient times, the repetition frequency determined the level of influence of this or that expression on the audience. Repetition used to be an element of ritual and gave the text certain qualities, increased the level of its persuasiveness. Many ancient texts can be viewed as highly ritualized, especially because of the presence of repeats and stereotypical rhetorical techniques in them. Recent times have brought new features that distinguish ritualized texts from low-ritualized texts. For example, Churchills' famous Fulton speech signalled the outbreak of the Cold War, in which he said: *From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the Continent* (Zlobin, 2000). The first pronouncing of this speech can be considered a low-ritualized one, however, nowadays, this speech can be classified as a ritual text. Hereby a qualitatively significant transition of the text to another category of ritualization happened in a relatively short historical period.

A new view is needed on the dynamics of ritualization of texts in political discourse, that would take into account some factors that have previously been left without due regard. Speech ritual helps to maintain the sense of integrity of the politicians' language personality. Speech ritual is a relatively broad phenomenon, and the mass audience usually waits for its "performance", although people cannot always figure out its beginning or ending in a political speech. It has a strong emotional influence and tends to meet the expectations of the audience. It would be incorrect to observe speech rituals only as regularly repeated symbolic actions, though we cannot deny "the symbolic nature of media communication, in which the power of the sign is fully manifested" (Vikulova & Serebrennikova, 2014, p. 55). The analysis of the actual material shows us that simple repetition is no longer the key point in modern political discourse. In our point of view, modern ritualized texts in political discourse are aimed at facilitating the perception of information by the mass audience and at consolidating this information as a significant one in the minds of the addressees. Ritual, as a rule, is not hidden by the politicians, on the contrary, it becomes a place where the semantic focus is made, and in which maximum emotional suggestion is put. In our opinion, ritual implies the repetition of not stereotypical actions, but the repetition of actions that

are made in the same discursive way. Ritual is teleological and is usually aimed at a specific target audience.

The most important role in modern political discourse is given not to the number of author's repetitions of the text, but to quoting of a political speech or its part in mass media. Citation and quoting bring an element of ritualization to the source text. In political discourse, repetitions made by the authors themselves can be minimized, which happens because of the uncertain time limits of active actions of a politician. The presence of ritual in political discourse indirectly indicates the effectiveness of the influence of the politician on the audience. As citation grows, so do the discursive connections generated by the text, which leads to the ritualization of thoughts, judgments and statements. We can consider hyperlinks, reposts and likes in social networks, as well as various signs stimulating emotional response left by the audience in comments as types of indirect citation. All the above mentioned helps to distribute the text on the Internet more actively, to anchor its discursive connections, and to maintain a certain level of the emotional response of the audience to the ritualized text. The more the text is "reactive", the more it becomes ritualized. For example, the "mistakes" made in media texts can lead to a countless number of easily detectable responses. We should note that a "mistake" requires the audience to be familiar with at least a part of the context. D. Trump posted a message in Twitter in which he wrote about his meeting with the "whale prince": *"I just met with the Queen of England (U.K.), the Prince of Whales, the P.M. of the United Kingdom, the P.M. of Ireland, the President of France and the President of Poland"* (BBC News Service, 2019). Later he corrected the "mistake" and posted this message again with corrections (Trump, D. A message in the social network "Twitter", 2019). Another example of D. Trump's "mistake" is taken from his speech on the US Independence Day, in which he called *"absolutely new"* the obsolete air fighter F-22 (RIA-news official website, 2019). In the same speech he said: *"Our Army manned the air, it rammed the ramparts, it took over the airports, it did everything it had to do"* (Olorunnipa & Gearan, 2019). The reaction to the anachronism in the American media was very strong. The Americans wrote tweets about it very actively and discussed the ridiculousness of this "mistake" in them (Gstalter, 2019). The regularity of emergency of such "mistakes" allows us to conclude that they do not negatively affect the image of the American president.

We suggest calling the sense of self or group rightness (including the correctness of judgment or act) resulting from almost purely emotional influences, "the sense of emotional rightness". We understand "rightness" in the modern media environment as a synonym for general acceptance, wide prevalence. The politicians in their texts deliberately try to make the audience feel the emotional rightness and to make its reaction more ritualized. It happens because "The main system-forming goal of political media discourse is the struggle for power which serves as a determining factor in the choice of a strategic arsenal of communicative actions in the political media communication which are based on the desire to influence the intellectual, volitional and emotional sphere of the addressee" (Tameryan et al., 2019, p. 3). The sense of emotional rightness strengthens the resistance of the audience to alternative information, reduces fatigue when it is necessary to increase the frequency of repetition of the text or its part. "A promotional campaign consists mostly of tautologies because it is emotion-targeted. It helps to achieve the suggestion to the addressee of several basic thoughts, and the constant repetition creates the impression of ideological clarity and coherence" (Zheltukhina, 2016, p. 156). It should be mentioned that only

cognitions can be denied or disputed, but individual emotions are true for the person just because of the fact of their occurrence. Therefore, in modern political discourse, emotions that provoke the emergence of "emotional rightness" require particular attention from the politicians. Often the emotions provocating the sense of "emotional rightness" are framed into a special cognitive-emotional unit. For example, D. Trump, telling the Americans about the murder of Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani in Tehran, called him a "bad guy": *"He was a bad guy. He was a blood-thirsty terror, and he's no longer a terror, he's dead"* (The Guardian online newspaper, 2020). He began his speech with the words: *"I'm pleased to inform you: The American people should be extremely grateful and happy no Americans were harmed in last night's attack by the Iranian regime"*. Such a formulation, which includes the sequence *"pleased-grateful-happy"* is certainly ritualized, and initially sets the audience up for a positive perception of this news. D. Trump makes a kind of distraction of the audience from the fact that it is illegal to kill a political leader on the territory of another country. The audience doesn't know if Qasem Soleimani is really a bad or a good person, and whether everything that D. Trump says about him is true: "He trained terrorist armies, including Hezbollah, launching terrorist strikes against civilian targets. He fuelled bloody civil wars all across the region. He viciously wounded and murdered thousands of U.S. troops, including the planting of roadside bombs that maim and dismember their victims" (The White House official website, 2020). Emotional rightness, in our point of view, is one of the most important signs of a highly ritualized text in modern political discourse.

An important role in ritualization is also played by minimizing the informational base, which leads to the emergency of expected emotions from the side of the audience. For example, D. Trump actively uses the social network "Twitter" to address the audience (Donald Trump's official page in the social network "Twitter", 2020). We believe that such a format with a limited number of possible signs in a message was not chosen accidentally. It does not cognitively overload the audience and is enough for causing relatively complex encouraging or provocative emotions. The basis of the speech ritual is hard to be distinguished, the ritual arises as if from nowhere. They emerge from minimal provoking linguistic and non-linguistic factors, and then attract to themselves other linguistic phenomena, and are finally gradually formed as a massive phenomenon. The appearance reasons of a ritual are complex, they are not relevant to purely linguistic factors. It should be noted that the majority of modern political texts in media discourse are produced by the team of authors, although in this article we consider all texts as authorial. The presence of ritualization in the text lets us make a relatively reliable conclusion about the presence of the target audience and can help us to guess some of its characteristics. For example, D. Trump tends to make ritualized statements concerning the topic of traditional family relations and traditional religious values: *"Trump has spoken at religious events and likes to be photographed at the White House with pastors laying their hands on him in prayer. He called for Christians to pray for him this week amid impeachment"* (Dawsey & Bailey, 2019).

An effective speech stereotype is likely to develop into an image speech ritual. Image speech ritual we understand as repeated in a political speech language phenomenon aimed at maintaining or changing the image of the language personality. Thus, ritual image is not always determined by the pure pragmatism of speech. It can have delayed consequences. For example, Xenia Sobchak had an image of "glamorous diva" before participating in the 2018 presidential election campaign but shortly before the

election campaign, she acquired an image of a political specialist. In 2008, Xenia took part in the TV-show "Blondinka v shokolade" (A blonde in chocolate) on a popular Russian youth channel "MUZ-TV". Her speech was full of colloquial, mistakes, youth slang, pejorative, vulgar words: *"Не получится, что все в вечерних платьях, а я одна блин как дура в лоховских джинсах?"* (the words "блин" and "лоховской" are obscene); *"втюхивать"* (a slang word); *"покрасивеe"* (the wrong comparative form of the adjective); *"Я одену"* (a lexical mistake). Receiving the award from the Russian "Glamour" magazine in the nomination a "television presenter", Xenia pronounced the following speech: *"Такие слова в русском языке как гламур, педикюр, Côte d'Azur, вызывают такие рефлекторно-неприязненные ощущения у россиян, впрочем, как и словосочетание Ксения Собчак, вот. И, соответственно, я хочу выразить свою благодарность даже не маме за то, что она родила в этот мир меня, а хочу выразить благодарность всем тем людям, которые делают этот журнал, очеловечивают такое важное слово как гламур"* (translation: "*Such words in the Russian language as "glamour", "pedicure", "Côte d 'Azur", as well as the phrase "Xenia Sobchak" cause such reflexively-dislikeable feelings among Russians, well. And in accordance with this I want not only to express my gratitude to my mother for giving me birth in this world but also to thank all those people who make this magazine, who humanize such an important word as "glamour"*) (MUZ-TV official YouTube channel, 2015). In 2017 she gave an interview to the same magazine "Glamour", but this time she was talking about more serious problems, her speech contained no serious mistakes: *"И дело не только в разнице зарплат до 30 процентов...Меня особенно ужасает, что в стране даже нет запроса на равенство полов. В то время как в Америке после победы Трампа внезапно осознали, что права женщин снова надо отстаивать, у нас о них даже не задумываются. Я думаю, как раз потому, что у нас не хватает и всех остальных свобод: свободы слова, свободы выборов...Я общаюсь с разными людьми, мне всё интересно, я хочу всё знать, во всём участвовать, каждую секунду учиться — из этого состоит моя жизнь"* (translation: "*And it's not just about the difference of salaries up to 30 percent... I am particularly horrified about the fact that there is no request for gender equality in the country. While in America after Trump's victory the people suddenly realized that women 's rights should be defended again, we don't even think about them. I think, it happens just because we do not have enough other freedoms: the freedom of speech, the freedom of elections...I communicate with different people, and everything is interesting for me, I want to know everything, and to participate in everything, to study something every second –this is what my life consists of"*) (Fedorova, 2017). We can see a radical change of an image speech ritual. The same media personality uses differently ritualized texts, and does it consciously, deliberately in order to achieve long-term consequences. Thus, we can state that image ritual is quite mobile, and the degree of ritualization of the text may change depending on pragmatics.

In the virtual media environment, a speech ritual can be reduced to over-saturation of information. At the same time, it can have not enough necessary or expected informational component, or it can be replaced by the background emotionally-saturated information. Donald Trump, for example, expressed some scepticism about the relevance of environmental problems in his election campaign: Mr. Trump has called human-caused climate change a "hoax." He has vowed to dismantle the Environmental Protection Agency "in almost every form (Davenport, 2016). B. Obama "responded" to D. Trump with a highly

ritualized science article in which he made the following judgments: *"I believe the trend toward clean energy is irreversible… It can boost efficiency, productivity, and innovation… Regardless of U.S. domestic policies, it would undermine our economic interests to walk away from the opportunity to hold countries representing two-third of global emissions-including China, India, Mexico…..uncertainty that we face, I remain convinced that no country is better suited to confront the climate challenge and reap the economic benefits of a low-carbon future … participation in Paris process will yield great benefits for the American people…..great advantages of our system of government is that each president is able to chart his or her own policy course"* (Obama, 2017). In general, B. Obama's article looks like a set of stamped ritual phrases that do not fit the needs of the moment. We regard this as an unsuccessful attempt to shift the attention of the target audience from the topic of the current election race to the highly ritualized topic of environmental problems, related to climate.

Modern political systems are built in such a way that there is always at least a nominal opposition, with which a kind of a ritual dialogue is held. However, the speech ritual of political discourse does not always imply the response of the opponent. For example, V.V. Zhirinovsky often mentions the United States in his speeches, and does it in a negative way, usually at the end of the speech. For example, he does it in his speech at the LDPR rally in honour of the Defender of the Fatherland Day on February 23, 2018, though it seems that nothing should be said about other countries: *"Мы видим, какая грязная демократия в Америке, мы видим, какая несвободная пресса у них, мы видим, какие зависимые суды у них – они себя показали во всей красе!"* (translation: *"We see what a dirty democracy there is in America, we see what a non-free press they have, we see their dependent courts – they have shown themselves at their best!"* (Zhirinovsky, 2018a). In other speeches we can also meet the references to America: *"Это кому выгодно – оставить тысячи бандитов на севере Сирии?! Это же делает США и НАТО!... А сегодня это США, эта смута продолжается. И они улыбаются, встречаются, пьют шампанское, а потом ребята погибают"* (translation: *"Is it beneficial for anyone to leave thousands of bandits in northern Syria?! This is what the United States and NATO do!... And today the United States does it, and this confusion continues. And they smile, meet with each other, drink champagne, and then young men die")* (Zhirinovsky, 2018b). In another speech: *"И мы 18 марта 2018 года будем избирать правителя России. А то боремся с Америкой, а американское слово обозначает главу нашего государства. Американцы скажут, что вы, русские, даже названия нет для своего руководителя что ли? Это нужно исправить"* (translation: *"And we will elect the ruler of Russia on the 18th of March in 2018. We are fighting against America, while the American word means the head of our state. The Americans can say that "you, Russians, do not even have your own name for your leader? It needs to be corrected"*) (Zhirinovsky, 2017). We have also found a reference to the typical American food: *"Гамбургеры кругом у нас в Москве и Макдоналдсы. А где старые русские пирожковые?"* (translation: *"We have hamburgers and McDonalds everywhere in Moscow. Where are our old Russian pie shops?"* (Zhirinovsky, 2019). The speeches of V.V. Zhirinovsky, at the first sight, represent a chaotic set of topics in a very emotional style, but in our opinion, they are complex logically justified structures, that provide the audience with the necessary information by means of a complex of ritual speech actions. In our opinion, the speeches of V.V. Zhirinovsky have a high level of efficiency because of the degree of their ritualization.

7. Conclusion

Thus, summarizing everything we have said above, we can make the following conclusions about ritualization in modern political discourse. Ritual in political discourse has lost many of its usual features, that are inherent for the ritual in general. It is more appropriate to talk about the level of ritualization of texts in political discourse than to divide texts into ritual and non-ritual ones. Texts in political discourse are usually highly ritualized, however, it is possible to prove it only in retrospect. The signs of high ritualization of texts in political discourse are their high citation of them and responsiveness to them by the audience. The repetition of the text in modern political discourse is achieved by fundamentally different means than in the pre-internet era. The presence of "emotional rightness" in the text makes it possible to speak about the high degree of its ritualization and the probability of existing of alternative "emotionally correct" points of view.

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