AXIOLOGICAL INTERACTION OF 'OURS' AND 'THEIRS' IN THE AMERICAN MEDIA DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The opposition "ours" and "theirs"/"friend or foe" is axiologically significant in the worldview of a linguocultural community and intercultural communication of representatives of different linguistic cultures. The article deals with modelling the implementation of this opposition in the American media discourse. The sampling corpus incorporates 600 English news reports and feature articles, representing the conflict situation and selected from quality and popular US outlets. The main research methods applied are discourse, semantic, and contextual analysis. The model of the linguocultural opposition under study is based on the determination of the configurations of the evaluative interaction of "ours" and "theirs". In terms of socio-cultural classification, the differentiation of "ours" and "theirs" is grounded on such parameters as "social institutions" and "regional communities", which is due to the subject matter of the analyzed media texts. "Regional community" is a parameter characterised by a higher frequency value, which manifests itself in media texts devoted to external conflicts. A less frequent parameter "social institutions" is traced in media texts devoted to internal conflicts, for example, in the oppositions "religious vs secular", "democrats vs republicans". The prevalence of the parameter "regional community" over the parameter "social institutions" is accounted for by both the fact that the information agenda of the analyzed publications focuses more on external conflicts as well as by the trend to divert attention from domestic problems. Two types of interaction patterns have been singled out – one-model and multi-model.

Keywords: Conflict, discourse of media, evaluation, media text, opposition

1.   Introduction

The article is devoted to the implementation of the axiological opposition "ours" and "theirs" in the US media discourse on conflict topics. The linguoculturological opposition "ours" and "theirs" is one of the key conflictogens and conceptual dominant in the discourse of the American media. The study of evaluative meanings in the opposition "ours" and "theirs" is of theoretical value as a tool for determining the axiological significance of information in media texts of various genres. The relevance of the study is due to the interest in the peculiarities of the presentation of modern conflicts in media discourse from the standpoint of the value-semantic orientation of the content. Consideration of the features of the evaluative expression of the linguocultural opposition "ours" and "theirs"/"friend or foe" in multi-genre media texts devoted to conflicts of different types is aimed at identifying the deep connection between the processes of human cognitive activity and their reflection in the linguistic picture of the world of representatives of the American linguocultural community.

2.   Problem Statement

At the present stage of development of axiological research, sufficient experience has been accumulated, which makes it possible to theoretically substantiate the methodology of research carried out at the junction of axiological and media linguistics. Noting the interdisciplinary nature of the study of the opposition "us/them"/"friend or foe", it should be emphasized that in philosophy, the study of this dichotomy is associated with the problems of cognition (Buber, 2008). As a category of consciousness, the studied opposition is the object of study of psychology (Dixon et al, 2020). In linguistics, the analysis of the opposition "friend or foe" is characterized by a variety of approaches: from the standpoint of sociolinguistics (Duranti, 2015), pragmalinguistics (Il'inova & Kochetova, 2018), cultural linguistics (Kislitsyna, 2020), ethnolinguistics (Ovchinnikova, 2008), linguistic, cognitive linguistics (Alieva, 2017; Antonova, 2019), linguistic imagology (Kamalova, 2018).

Despite the attention of linguists to this phenomenon, the deep mechanisms of the implementation of the assessment in the linguocultural opposition "friend or foe" in the English-language media discourse of a conflict orientation remain unrevealed, since the opposition under study is a conflict-generating phenomenon. Conflict is a vivid and inevitable form of manifestation of human nature and his relationship with the outside world, therefore it is impossible to fully study the concept of "conflict" in isolation from the person, his language. Conflict is initially anthropocentric: it is born, moved and resolved by humans (Rogozhnikova & Salikhova, 2020; Volkov, 2020). Conflict topics are integrated into the conceptual space of the English-language media discourse and the linguistic consciousness of the linguocultural community, since the fundamental goal of the media is not only to inform the population, but also to form public opinion, views, beliefs, principles, stereotypes, speech culture (see, for example, Guslyakova, 2020; Marchenko, 2020). The perspective offered in the study integrates the methodological approaches of media linguistics, discourse analysis, cultural linguistics and decoding stylistics.

3. Research Questions

The range of research issues discussed in this article includes the following:

1. What parameters make it possible to differentiate "ours" and "theirs" in media texts of the *news report* and *feature article* genres of the American media discourse?
2. What are the configurational models of the axiological interaction of "ours" and "theirs" in media texts on conflict topics?
3. What are the features of the implementation of the models of interaction between "ours" and "theirs" in the US media discourse?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to describe the specifics of the evaluative interaction of "ours" and "theirs" in the framework of the implementation of the studied axiological dichotomy in American media texts on conflict topics. The main task is to show the interaction of the constituents of the opposition "ours" and "theirs"/"friend or foe" in the form of a number of configuration models. It should be noted that the implementation of this or that configuration primarily depends on what parameter will be used to divide "friends" and "foes", namely, who is perceived as a "friend" and who is perceived as a "foe".

5. Research Methods

The research material consisted of 600 media texts of the *news report* and *feature article* genres, representing the situation of the conflict. The sources of the selected media texts were high-quality popular US publications (*The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *New York Daily News*, *New York Post*, *USA Today*). The chronological framework is determined by the purpose and objectives of the study and covers the period from January 2018 to April 2020. To solve the set tasks, the following methods of linguistic analysis are used in the work: the *method of discourse analysis*, with the help of which the relationship between the linguistic and extralinguistic sides of the text is established; the *method of semantic analysis*, which made it possible to determine the semantic meaning of evaluative quanta in media texts; the method of contextual analysis – to determine the explicit and implicit ways of realizing evaluative meanings in the context. *The method of quantitative analysis* was used to identify and comprehensively present trends in the frequency of different aspects of actualization of the estimated value of the linguocultural opposition "ours" and "theirs".

6. Findings

Since the opposition "ours" and "theirs" is evaluative, it is advisable to consider its implementation from the point of view of the act of evaluation, which is a complex formation that includes the mechanism of conceptualization, coding and decoding of evaluation, and has a level structure in which perceptual, cognitive and pragmatic levels can be distinguished. It is at the pragmatic level that the act of evaluating an object by the subject evaluating it appears in its complete form (Chudinov, 2003). It seems logical to

rely on the model of the act of assessment, represented by the proposition **A r B**, when identifying "ours" and "theirs", "friends" and "foes", where **A** is the subject of assessment, **B** is the object of assessment, **r** is an assessment, an assessment relation, a predicate (Vol'f, 2006, p. 12). At the heart of the implementation of the opposition "friend or foe" is the act of assessment and the relationship between the subject and the object of assessment. The basis of the assessment in the assessment act serves as a parameter that allows one to distinguish between "ours" and "theirs".

It seems appropriate to investigate the axiological interaction of the constituents of the opposition "ours" and "theirs" in the context of the sociocultural classification of A. A. Matveeva. This classification includes the following criteria: personality; social group; social organizations; social institutions; classes; ethnic groups; regional communities; race (Matveeva, 2012). The analysis of the selected media texts showed that only two of the parameters listed above, namely, "social institutions" and "regional communities", can serve as a basis for distinguishing "ours" and "theirs". This observation is explained by the topic of media texts that made up the empirical corpus and devoted to conflicts (armed, political, economic, religious). The parameter "regional community", which is the most representative, is manifested mainly in media texts devoted to external conflicts. The division into "ours" and "theirs" according to the parameter "regional community" is noted in the media text of the *feature article* genre *Abandoned by U.S. in Syria, Kurds Find New Ally in American Foe* in the New York Times (Hubbard et al., 2019). The point is that the withdrawal of American troops from the north of Syria forced the Kurdish military units to begin negotiations with the Syrian government, which is the sworn enemy of the United States and enjoys the support of Russia. From the point of view of the author of the publication, the United States and, up to a certain point, the Kurds they support, are "friends", the government of Syria and Russia are "foes". A less frequent parameter "social institutions" is recorded in publications devoted to internal conflicts, for example, in the oppositions "religious versus secular", "democrats versus republicans". So, in the media text of the American popular edition of the New York Daily News, which supports the US Democratic Party, *Trump tells his own spy chiefs to 'go back to school' after they contradict him on North Korea, ISIS, Russia* (Sommerfeldt, 2019), we are talking about the fact that the US President called on representatives of the US intelligence community to "return to school" because, in his opinion, they underestimate the danger from Iran and contradict the president's own assessments of the situation. Differentiation of "friends" and "foes" in this publication takes place according to the parameter "social institutions" (from the point of view of belonging to different political parties, namely, "Democrats vs Republicans"). Thus, Donald Trump and US intelligence appear to be "foes", and the author of the publication and representatives of the Democratic Party – "friends."

To describe the models of interaction between "ours" and "aliens", a formula notation is used: where "X" is our own, which can act as a subject of assessment (X_1) or an object of assessment (X_2), "Y" is an alien, acting as a subject (Y_1) or the object of assessment (Y_2), "→" – the attitude of the subject to the object, "+" / "–" – the nature of the assessment. The evaluative interaction of "ours" and "theirs" in the studied linguocultural opposition can be represented in the form of the following configuration models:

- «ours» (X_1) evaluates «ours» (X_2) positively or ($X_1 \rightarrow + X_2$);
- «ours» (X_1) evaluates «ours» (X_2) negatively or ($X_1 \rightarrow - X_2$)

- «ours» (X) evaluates «theirs» (Y) positively or $(X \rightarrow + Y)$
- «ours» (X) evaluates «theirs» (Y) negatively or $(X \rightarrow - Y)$
- «theirs» (Y) evaluates «ours» (X) positively or $(Y \rightarrow + X)$
- «theirs» (Y) evaluates «ours» (X) positively or $(Y \rightarrow + X)$
- «theirs» (Y_1) evaluates «theirs» (Y_2) positively or $(Y_1 \rightarrow + Y_2)$
- «theirs» (Y_1) evaluates «theirs» (Y_2) negatively or $(Y_1 \rightarrow - Y_2)$.

Most of the proposed configurations of the "friend or foe" opposition find their expression in American media texts on conflict topics. In the media texts of the news report genre of the US media discourse, the most frequent configuration is $\mathbf{X \rightarrow - Y}$ (55%). Configurations $\mathbf{Y \rightarrow + X}$ and $\mathbf{Y_1 \rightarrow - Y_2}$ were not found in the selected news texts. The most representative configuration model that is expressed in the feature article media texts is also the $\mathbf{X \rightarrow - Y}$ configuration (46%). The least frequent configuration in feature article publications is the $\mathbf{X \rightarrow + Y}$ model (1%). The configuration $\mathbf{Y \rightarrow + X}$ in the selected texts of the feature article genre is not fixed. Thus, the actualized configurations $\mathbf{X_1 \rightarrow + X_2}$, $\mathbf{X_1 \rightarrow -X_2}$, $\mathbf{X \rightarrow + Y}$, $\mathbf{X \rightarrow - Y}$, $\mathbf{Y \rightarrow - X}$ and $\mathbf{Y_1 \rightarrow + Y_2}$ are invariant for media texts of the *news report* and *feature article* genres, while the configuration $\mathbf{Y_1 \rightarrow - Y_2}$ is variable, since it is presented only in media texts of the *feature article* genre.

In addition, in the media texts of both genres, cases are noted when the author of the publication does not associate himself with any hero of the publication, as with "ours," and the opposition being studied is expressed implicitly through the position of its author. Such cases can be represented in the form of the following configuration models, the invariant nature of which is due to the fact that they are observed in media texts of both genres under study:

- «implicit ours» (X_{impl}) – the author of the publication / implicit subject of evaluation – evaluates «theirs» (Y) positively $(X_{impl} \rightarrow + Y)$
- «implicit ours» (X_{impl}) evaluates «theirs» (Y) negatively $(X_{impl} \rightarrow - Y)$

In the course of the analysis of the implementation of the noted configuration models of realization of the opposition "ours" and "theirs"/"friend or foe", it was noted that this realization is possible in two types, namely, when only one of the above models is realized in the publication (one-model realization of the opposition "ours" and "theirs"/"friend or foe") or when the opposition "ours" and "theirs"/"friend or foe" is presented in one publication by several models at once (multi-model implementation of the opposition "ours" and "theirs"/"friend or foe"). We note that the multi-model implementation of the "ours" and "theirs"/"friend or foe" opposition is more representative in the selected American media texts (90%).

The news report *China blasts Mike Pence's 'arrogance and hypocrisy' over human rights remarks* in the New York Post (Steinbuch, 2019) is an example of a multi-model implementation of the "friend or foe" opposition within the text of a publication. This media text is devoted to criticizing the policies of the Trump administration and foreign policy mistakes in relations with China. Differentiation of the opposition "ours" and "theirs"/"friend or foe" is taking place according to the principle of "regional community": "friends" is the United States represented by Vice President M. Pence, "foes" is China and its authorities. So, in the mentioned media text, four configuration models are implemented at once, namely: $\mathbf{Y \rightarrow - X}$, $\mathbf{X_1 \rightarrow - X_2}$, $\mathbf{X \rightarrow - Y}$, $\mathbf{X \rightarrow + Y}$. An example of the $\mathbf{Y \rightarrow - X}$ configuration is the

statement by the official representative of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Hua Chunying, *"A handful of politicians with Pence at their head* **have confused black with white** *on these issues, making* **irresponsible remarks** *and creating* **rumors to slander** *others," she said*, in which she (Y) negatively assesses ("–") the policy pursued by M. Pence (X), noting that it is based on "frivolous comments" that give rise to rumors and slander. Configuration $X_1 \rightarrow -X_2$ also finds its expression in this media text: *"In* **siding with** *the Chinese Communist Party and* **silencing free speech***, the NBA is acting like* **a wholly owned subsidiary of the authoritarian regime***" for failing to stand up to the government's criticism of Rockets general manager Daryl Morey*. In this passage, M. Pence (X_1) accuses ("–") the leaders of the NBA (X^2) of supporting the Chinese Communist Party and its policies, thereby becoming a "subsidiary" of the authoritarian regime. An example of a configuration model $X \rightarrow -Y$ in the analyzed media text is the passage *Pence's speech at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars was billed as follow-up to an address he gave last year in which he accused China of improperly seeking to influence congressional elections to defeat President Trump*, in which M. Pence (X) accuses ("–") official China (Y) of unacceptable attempts to influence President Trump by interfering in the elections to the US Congress. Another configuration model that appears in this newsletter, $X \rightarrow +Y$, is reflected in the following context: *"He emphasized the* **US does not want to 'decouple'** *and repeated how US President Donald Trump is* **willing to start a new future** *with China," it said. "He also underlined the* **friendship** *between Chinese President Xi and his US counterpart Donald Trump."*. The above passage notes that M. Pence (X) nevertheless sees certain grounds for optimism ("+") in relations between the United States and China, emphasizing the American president's desire for friendship and future good relations with China (Y).

The media text *No, Trump couldn't shoot someone without being investigated for it* in the Washington Post (Katyal & Geltzer, 2019) is dedicated to the fact that the US president behaves as if he is above the law of the state and is not threatened with impeachment, despite all of it "unlawful acts in the presidency". The differentiation of "ours" and "theirs"/"friend or foe" in this publication is based on the parameter "social institutions" ("Democrats vs Republicans"): Donald Trump is positioned as "foe", and representatives of the Democratic Party as "friends". This media text serves as an example of a one-model implementation of the "friend or foe" opposition through the $X_{impl} \rightarrow -Y$ configuration model. So, in the passage *The president is arguing that he's* **completely above the law***. He's* **wrong***,* the author of the publication (X_{impl}) emphasizes the erroneous opinion of President Trump (Y), who considers himself above the law ("–"). The configuration model $X_{impl} \rightarrow -Y$ is invariant in the case of a single-model implementation of the opposition "friend or foe" in the selected media texts.

7. Conclusion

In the course of the analysis, it was found that in media texts of the news report and feature article, devoted to conflict topics, such two parameters of differentiation of "our own" and "alien" as "social institutions" and "regional community" are implemented, while the parameter "regional community" dominates over the parameter "social institutions". The dominance of the parameter "regional community" (80%) over the parameter "social institutions" (20%) is explained by the fact that the

publication agenda of the publications selected for analysis focuses more on external conflicts, including to divert attention from domestic problems.

Modeling the realization of the opposition "friend or foe" in the American media discourse presupposes the determination of the configurations of the evaluative interaction of "friend" and "foe". This interaction can be actualized in eight logically possible configurations. Six configurations are invariant $(X_1 \rightarrow + X_2, \ X_1 \rightarrow - X_2, \ X \rightarrow + Y, \ X \rightarrow - Y, \ Y \rightarrow - X$ and $Y_1 \rightarrow + Y_2)$ and find their expression both in media texts of the *news report* genre and in the *feature article*.

The most frequent configuration in the selected media texts of both the *news report* and *feature article* genres is $X \rightarrow - Y$. The least representative in both genres is a variant of the configuration model $X \rightarrow + Y$, in which the subject is expressed implicitly $(X_{impl} \rightarrow + Y)$.

The implementation of the mentioned interaction models is possible in two types: single-model (when only one of the configurations is presented in the media text) and multi-model (when the opposition "friend-foe" is represented in one media text by several configurations at once) implementation of the opposition "friend-foe". The analysis showed that in the cases of a single-model implementation, the $X_{impl} \rightarrow - Y$ configuration is universal in the selected media texts.

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