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PERSUASIVE RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE: LINGUISTIC MECHANISMS OF IMPACT

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Abstract

The paper explores issues of manipulative impact from the viewpoint of suggestion as its element enacted through psychological means of rapport, adjunction, and leading. The methods used include discourse analysis, stylistic analysis, and textual interpretation; in combination, they enable the author to elicit language means and communicative strategies of persuasive discourse and assess the selected language units as cable of serving the means of persuasion. The material of the study is a specific genre of the Mass Media, namely, religious publications which by their very nature aim at persuasive effect. On the whole religious discourse in the framework of Mass Media facilitate inducing the writer's position in the reader's mind. The ideological format of the magazine perfectly involves various technologies of 'brainwashing'. The analysis shows that language manipulation in this type of discourse is mostly based on the hidden possibilities of the language. Among stylistic devices a considerable role is played by rhetoric questions, metaphors, a specific choice of words; means of suggestion include such manipulative techniques as the creation of displaced comparisons, false contrapositions, lexical reiterations, and the use of equivocal language.

Keywords: Impact, persuasion, religious discourse, speech manipulation

1. Introduction

The object of research in this paper is declared as considering language mechanisms of structuring persuasive religious discourse. It requires the author to briefly explore the categories of discourse, persuasiveness, the theory of impact that for decades have been in the focus of interest of scholars belonging to various national research traditions. To whatever linguistic school a researcher belongs to discourse is always viewed with an account of extralinguistic parameters accompanying speech production. The French school of analysis for one thing mostly aims at eliciting culture-related factors, mythologems underlying any text, inter alia a verbal one (P-M. Foucault; P. Serio; R. Bart, etc.). Anglo-American tradition on the other hand focuses on studying speech interaction ad hoc, i.e., 'individual language use comes to the fore which is conditioned by several factors… From this perspective, for every single speech act requires a certain socio-pragmatic description which brings the research into the domain of discourse analysis' (Pak, 2003, p.17). In the framework of Russian linguistics, discourse investigation also centres round its determination by extralinguistic phenomena but is primarily connected with functional linguistics. The latter has always postulated the necessity of exploring a statement/text in communicative/action facet from the viewpoint of such extralinguistic parameters as the sphere of interaction, the type of activity, goals, and objectives of communication, etc. (Chernyavskaya, 2020). Spheres of interaction are interpreted as types of discourse (Karasik, 2000, 2004; Prohorov, 2021, etc). V. Karasik elaborated two fundamental types of discourse – person-oriented which enables the scholar to introduce a new paradigm, that of personology, and status-oriented, or institutional types described as such varieties as political, legal, diplomatic, administrative, military, commercial, religious ones and others (Karasik, 2000). Whatever type of discourse is under analysis it necessarily focuses on its pragmatic objectives and the language mechanisms of their implementation. The core principle is the interaction of language, culture, and ideological assumptions of language users. Language, culture, and ideology are intertwined in various discourse practices which in their turn are shaped by people representing different cultures, ideologies, and social constructs (Bila & Ivanova, 2020; Mudi & Eslami, 2020).

The category of persuasiveness has come to the fore as combining rhetoric, stylistic, and pragmatic parameters of discourse. It is viewed as the broadest one defined as an ability to induce certain conduct or acquire a certain point of view by both logical devices of reasoning and proving and by irrational suggestion and emotional influence. As a linguistic category, persuasion is considered from a pragmatic perspective as a functional characteristic of speech related to the manifestation of impact due to rhetoric means of appealing to the recipient's mind and feelings. The feeling aspect has come to the fore in view of the concept of emotionalization within media discourse (Alba-Hues & Larina, 2018; Zappettini et al., 2021).

2. Problem Statement

2.1. Today we are facing increasing political, ideological, religious confrontations in the world. At the beginning of the current millennium, scientists warned against ripening informational clashes (Gurevich, 2003). On the other hand, in the digital epoch, there is a rapid increase of mass communication

as a new sphere of language use (Dobrosklonskaya, 2008). So, the interest of linguists in issues of language impact is quite natural (Fenina, 2017; Korotez, 2017; Shkitskaya, 2019). The interest in problems of language mechanisms of forming opinions is confirmed by objective data. According to the estimation of the authors of a three-volume collective monograph 'Linguistics of informational-psychological wars' between 2003 and 2018 in the All-Russian electronic library eLIBRARY there appeared 713 scientific papers considering these issues from different perspectives; numerous conferences are being held, conceptual apparatus of researches is being elaborated. Today such notions as 'impressing' (Viktorova, 2014), linguo-ideological analysis, ideological narrative, ideologemes, framing (Bernatskaya et al., 2020), speech manipulation (Kopnina, 2012), imagology are actively getting into scholars' usage. The latter names an interdisciplinary research trend focusing on images of regions, countries, and peoples in either native or alien milieu. Tomsk state university since 2014 has published a scientific journal named "Imagology and comparative studies' which, inter alia, explores the issues of correlation of current political situations and the ways they are reflected in national languages (Budaev & Chudinov, 2019; Grishaeva, 2018; Orekhov, 2020). Another latest trend that gets increasingly popular is ecological linguistics (Brusenskaya & Kulikova, 2018). The ecology of the language is not only related to issues of normative use but also concerns urgent problems of the language's destructive power.

2.2. Manipulation is viewed as a form of regulating knowledge, opinions, beliefs controlling human behaviour. This is a multimodal phenomenon including communicative, psychological, ethical, social, cognitive, semiotic, and discourse aspects (Bernatskaya et al., 2020). As a result, there appears a certain framing, i.e., creating a definite 'picture' in the recipient's mind which an addresser needs. Means of speech manipulation are considered in a broad view of cognitive formatting conceptual content. Framing consists in the actualization of certain frames ('family', 'love', 'peace') typical for propaganda, persuasive types of discourse. The theory of imagology deals with axiological aspect of language role in forming the system of values in social consciousness, looking for the answers to traditional questions of how the language forms the image of the person acquiring the system of views being imposed upon them on the part of 'strategic communicants', or 'discourse trumpets'.

The studies of speech manipulation and persuasive discourse go back to the ancient tradition of rhetoric. Speech impact is defined as the use of peculiar devices and functioning of language as a semiotic system designed to form statements capable of influencing the mind and behaviour of addressees of those statements. Of interest is the very title of a manual written by Chernyavskaya (2017) 'Discourse of power and power of discourse: the problems of speech impact' which has become popular in academic circles. The author defines discourse as 'the use of language systematized and arranged in a particular way underlying a definite ideological and socially conditioned reality' (cited: from the abstract to the book). Language/speech is a powerful form of impact, a directed cognitive and communicative action that includes psychological mechanisms of influence. In scholastic literature on rhetorics as the science to teach, to convince, and to attract the audience, different typologies of means of speech impact and/or manipulation are elaborated that go back to Aristotle's rhetorical theory in which feelings and mind are combined as two underlying facets of impact. Hence relevant notions designating means of impact are proving, convincing, and suggesting (Sternin, 2012).

In its turn, suggestion involves rapport, adjunction, and leading. The broad spread of religious, medical, didactic, political, and apolitical trends resorting to various means of impact ranging from rational and emotional means to direct hypnosis has made the study of speech mechanisms of impact an urgent trend of investigation.

2.3. So, this article addresses the issue of manipulation means, in particular, those aimed at achieving rapport, adjunction, and leading based on popular religious discourse. As to religious discourse, one should give a few preliminary remarks. Religious discourse is considered as a specific type of institutional discourse, a specialized clichéd variety of communication conditioned by social functions of partners and regulated both in terms of content and form as the mechanism of preserving sacred knowledge. On this basis there appear regimented patterns of behaviour that are aimed at recruiting believers in the frames of certain religions or religious groups; those behaviour patterns become criteria for assessing behaviour of people. According to Karasik (2004), the structure of religious discourse includes goals, values, strategies, chronotype, texts, varieties and genres, material (either oral or written), and participants (agents, clients). From this set, the given articles focus on discourse strategies chosen to achieve the goals.

3.   Research Questions

3.1. To describe mechanisms of impact Leontyev (2003) introduced the notions of 'the field of meaning', and 'the sense field', where the former designates the speaker/ writer's structure of social experience as well as objective net by which they perceive the world and subjectively it. 'The sensing field' is the correlation of the system of meaning and motives, and the inclusion of meanings into the system of personality and activity of the recipient. Speech impact is implemented through the change of somebody's sense field using a definite speech strategy.

Technologies of speech impact can and should be described from the viewpoint of rhetoric means. In the framework of linguistic pragmatics three groups of communicative implicatures are considered:

a)   semantic presuppositions as means of conveying implicit information, associative and connotative meaning of words and collocations, metaphors as tools of implication, analogies, and comparisons;

b)   on the level of formal syntaxis those microstructures are explored that are embodied in the

Major problems of speech impact are connected with the study of the speaker's strategies as well as all available language resources that condition achieving communicative goals. The choice of the set of means depends on and is conditioned by the chosen communicative strategy. The notion of communicative strategy means the general plan of how most effectively to realize definite communicative intent of the message sender; this plan regulates the content or subject of the information; communicative effect (addressee's response); choice and combination of language means providing speech manifestation of intended goals of communication (Chernyavskaya, 2017). To reach the intended communicative effect various speech devices, techniques, and tactics. This research deals with analyzing several tactics and devices that are of interest to the chosen material.

3.2. The research question consists in considering what communicative strategies and corresponding linguistic tactics are employed to achieve the communicative goals on the part of religious

writers; the material chosen belongs to a specific genre of Mass Media – religious magazines which by their very nature are aimed at persuasive effect.

4.   Purpose of the Study

Strategies of religious discourse are determined by its goals and strategies, the fundamental goal is to make a person a strong believer; among others which clarify and specify the basic one, there distinguish educational, and supportive which correspond to such strategies as praying, confessing, appealing, instructional, and ritual (Karasik, 2000). As for the genres, the Media have become an important platform for implementing different objectives, and as a result, nearly all types of institutional discourse are actualized in the Mass Media. Interaction of religion and the Media has become regimented by social norms, and consequently, becomes the subject of public debates. Religious discourse incorporated into the Mass Media narrows the set of elements, communicative strategies, purposes, communicants as well as linguistic means of achieving the goals. Each strategy can be embodied by a choice and combination of language means providing speech implementation of the conceived goals (Goncharova, 2019; Lesnyak & Tovkalenko, 2021; Ruzhentseva et al., 2020). So, the purpose of this paper is to elicit and analyze the language means used in texts taken from a religious journal that fulfill the underlying goal of the publications, i.e., to persuade the readers to accept and follow the promulged religion.

5.   Research Methods

For the raised questions to be answered the author applies the method of textual interpretation of the text as well as the method of discourse analysis, and stylistic method aimed at eliciting rhetoric devices on both lexical (tropes), and syntactical (figures of speech) levels. The complexity of these research procedures makes it possible to assess the linguistic devices on both lexical and syntactical levels which serve the purpose of persuasion. The methodological basis of the research is the conceptions of political linguistics, linguistics of informational and psychological wars, the theory of speech manipulation.

6.   Findings

6.1. The research results in exploring the way readers' identity is constructed. The material is a popular religious discourse, in particular, a few issues of Jehovah's Witness Watchtower Awake Magazine ('Awake!') which has been published since 1946 in both English and Russian, the latest issue was released on March 7, 2021. Several issues get into the list of publications prohibited in the Russian Federation as being extremist by content. The purpose of the magazine is declared as 'field service'. The editors so articulate the mission of the magazine: 'This is a magazine for the whole family. Its publications talk about life in different countries, address urgent problems, raise the issues of science and religion, analyze world events and what lies beneath. In doing so the articles are politically neutral and equally respectful to all peoples and races. But the basic thing is that the magazine strengthens faith in Supreme Creator and His design – to put an end to unfairness and unlawfulness and in nearest future to

establish a new wonderful world on the earth' (Artemyev, 2010). Its predecessor was the magazine 'Consolation' as 'a magazine of facts, hope, and courage'. Even superficial look at the language tools used, the very names of the magazines show a typical propaganda framing: the readers will acquire and strengthen the belief that the earthly world is that of unlawfulness and unfairness; the phrases 'in the nearest future', and 'a new wonderful world' form the ideologemes the authors need, i.e., specific concepts incorporating collective, mythologized views on modern political arrangement of the world, its ideological institutions. All publications are united by a single intention – to affect the system of values by extensive use of equivocal language: moral values are presented as solely religious ones.

In further research, I will explore major persuasive means and tactics frequently employed in such strategies of religious discourse as convincing and elucidating.

6.2. The first step in constructing the readers' new identity is to establish rapport. To achieve the goal, communicants employ various means to attract the readers' attention, provide them with the information which would interest them, and bring about the wish to continue the virtual interaction.

6.3. One way to establish rapport is to convey information by the 'plus-minus' principle which contraposes insiders and outsiders/aliens. This strategy may be achieved by resorting to contrasting collocations, and antithesis; for a greater effect not infrequently alliterations, and rhetorical means of speech impact are used since they create the illusion of a dialogue with the addressee, but impose a definite estimation of a situation. Let's take for example the title of the article – 'GLOBALIZATION - Curse or Cure?' (Awake Magazine, n.d.). Another title in the same issue discussing globalization and its effect on mankind is 'Globalization – The Hopes and the Fears'. The psychological effect of infusion is especially strong on the initial level of reasoning since it appeals to emotions forming the psychic state which manipulators need. The title itself contains elements of suggestion of both verbal and nonverbal character. Nominalization of lexical units, i.e., the use of three nouns in a line, the alliteration of the initial [k] sound in the monosyllabic words 'curse' and 'cure', the first word that is printed in capital letters, the graphic juxtaposition of the black and the white in-text arrangement – all the devices may not be perceived by the recipient consciously but rather are manipulative ones.

In the following extract persuasiveness is achieved through contrasting a person's standard of life with an exclusive dwelling complex (the mention of the heroine's name as well as such details as 'three marble tombs', '15 kilometers', '27-hole golf course', adjectives 'large', 'metal', 'marble', 'huge', 'exclusive', 'elegant'):

'Fatima, a resident of a large African city, considers herself fortunate. At least she has a refrigerator. But her family's home is just a metal shack erected alongside three marble tombs. Like half a million other residents, she lives in a huge cemetery. And even the cemetery is getting crowded. "Too many people moving in," she complains, "especially here in the tombs." About 15 kilometers from Fatima's home lies an exclusive new housing complex, complete with elegant restaurants and a 27-hole golf course. The cost of one round of golf is more than the per capita monthly wage in this African country' (Awake Magazine, n.d., p. 4).

Contraposition may run through the whole text as the underlying principle of text organization. As an example, one can analyze the article entitled 'Chasing the Wind' (Awake Magazine, n.d., pp. 3-7). The title is accompanied by the caricature depicting a group of people who follow a man holding a plaque with the inscription 'This way to world peace!'. In combination with the title, the message of the whole article becomes clear: people are chasing the wind. The metaphorical implication is revealed based on the biblical parable about ancient Yahudi's refusal to follow God, as they put their trust in Egypt and Assyria. There is a direct correlation with the trust of modern Christians in the might of states and political institutions. Framing is created using several devices, repetition being the key one. Besides the text draws a dismal picture of the modern world (nuclear-armed nations, teetering on the brink of an atomic holocaust, great stockpiles of nuclear weapons, destructive power is frightening to contemplate, wasteland, the fantastic potential for destruction, awful testimony to the upper failure of man's peace efforts). The metaphor 'to chase the wind' conceptualizes the uselessness of all attempts to achieve peace by political instruments. The idea is strengthened by the use of comparative constructions; their abundance drives home to recipients' minds the idea about the inevitable catastrophe of the humans who have lost appropriate faith.

'The people who have trusted in the peace agencies of the world appear like men who might senselessly run about trying to catch the wind' (Awake Magazine, n.d., p. 6);

'As God warned the ten-tribe kingdom that he would bring disaster upon them because they had turned their backs on him and did not place their hope and trust on him, so he has warned the world of our day' (Awake Magazine, n.d.., p. 6).

The logic based on the use of equivocal language brings the reader to the denouement, 'Trust in Jehovah'; so the place of correct faith and hope is found. The chain of rhetorical questions, syntactical parallel constructions with anaphoric 'he' enhances the effect:

'Are not people today what Jeremiah said not to do when they place their hope for world peace and security in the UN or worldly governments? Are they not making earthling man their trust instead of God?' (Awake Magazine, n.d.., p.6)

'He did not trust…He did not look to…' (Awake Magazine, n.d.., p.7).

The final paragraph of the article combines the metaphor 'wind' with 'false hopes' drawing a direct correlation between 'faith in Jehovah' and 'proper religion':

'Trust in Jehovah is never misplaced. It is never like chasing the wind' (Awake Magazine, n.d.., p.7)

The principle of contrast gets fully implemented in the article 'Thirsting after righteousness' (Awake Magazine, n.d.). As it becomes clear from the title the text juxtaposes hunger and thirst as physical and spiritual properties. The first lines of attention are drawn to the description of human basic needs which brings us to the next step of suggestion, that of adjunction, because the reference to human needs is sure not only to establish contact with an addressee but also to line up with them.

'Hunger is a strong word…..but thirst appears to be a stronger word' (Awake Magazine, n.d., p. 3)

The reference to the facts enhances the effect of establishing rapport:

'…blood is 92 percent water, muscles are 75 percent water, even 22 percent of our bones and 2 percent of teeth enamel is water" (Awake Magazine, n.d., p. 3)

There creates contraposition of 'a natural man' and 'spiritual man', correspondingly, 'thirst for water' is contrasted to 'thirst for righteousness'. The sustained metaphor is supported by the following phrases: 'to quench the desires of the mind and heart', 'seek food and drink from heaven'. A frequent device of double-talk completes the passage:

'Bread sustains the body, but the utterances of Jehovah feed the spirit. Both foods are essential for a happy life. (Awake Magazine, n.d., p.4)

Rapport is established by direct questions addressed to the reader at the beginning of the article which introduces the topic of discussion attracting and intriguing the reader:

'If you were unable to buy the gadgets and furnishings you need for housekeeping and everyday living, could you improvise? Could you take discarded things and what you find growing near your home and make usable items from them?' (Awake Magazine, n.d.., p.7)

6.4. Next step in winning the audience is adjunction, i.e., 'fine tuning' to the readers' mind, winning their trust. A common strategy here is the creation of the semantic field 'insiders, one's own' used to unite the addresser with the addressees by using inclusive pronouns 'we, our us'.

'But there is no value in experience if we cannot learn from it. From our experiences, we should learn to distill principles that will help us avoid mistakes and that will help us become more effective in what we are doing. But if we were to rely entirely on self- distilled principles for daily living, for coping with the problems certain to confront us in these difficult times, how unhappy we would be!' (Awake Magazine, n.d., Volume XLI, London, England, January S, 1961, Number 1, p 3-4).

Another example with the use of personal pronouns in the following passages:

'Understandably, then, globalization engenders fears as well as hopes. Do you have reason to fear globalization? Or can you expect it to make your life more prosperous? Has globalization given us reason to be optimistic about the future? Our following article will address these questions' (Awake Magazine, n.d., p.3).

Here we deal with vivid tactics of fine-tuning. First direct questions are asked to the reader (you have, you expect, your life), then the writer passes on to the third person pronoun. By doing so the writer becomes 'insider' and is likely to win the trust ('we are in one team'). The final sentence here definitely intrigues the reader which intends to keep their attention.

Adjunction, as well as rapport, may be successfully achieved by resorting to factual argumentation. By giving statistical data the writer adds to depicting the picture of increasing social inequality:

'Experts claim that during the past ten years, the number of people below the poverty line in India has gone down from 39 percent to 26 percent and that Asia as a whole has seen a similar improvement. One study shows that by 1998, only 15 percent of the East Asian population lived on

$1 a day, compared with 27 percent ten years earlier. … In 1998, for example, just ten companies controlled 86 percent of the $262-billion telecommunications business... Would you like to live in a neighborhood where the richest 20 percent earn 74 times more than the poorest?' (Awake Magazine, n.d., p.4)

The final strategy of infusing required opinions is leading. As for language mechanisms, an effective one is emotionally colored lexical reiterations. Repetitions inevitably put an imprint on the memory. As an example, one can analyze an article from the issue XLIV of January,8th, 1968 from the viewpoint of how lexical repetitions result in framing. From the very first words of the article 'The Beauty of Self-Control' there are numerous morphological and syntagmatic repetitions of the lexical units 'control', 'beauty' (control, self-control, uncontrolled, controlling one's spirit, control of passion; the ark of beauty, physical beauty), as well as their synonyms (self-restraint, self-discipline). A definite analogy is created: beauty is in self-control, the latter is associated with religious service, belief in 'eternal life in God's kingdom'. The logical chain results in the frame 'beauty is in service':

'… self-control is as pleasing to see as physical beauty' (Awake Magazine, n.d, p.4).

7. Conclusion

The analysis done shows that the format of popular religious discourse is embodied in the genre of the magazine, in which the whole narrative is a definite discursive construct in a combination of communicative, pragmatic, and functional parameters. The analysis shows that all publications present extensive possibilities for expressing such fundamental classical rhetoric features as logos, pathos, and ethos which imply a specific organization of discourse. On the whole religious discourse in the framework of Mass Media facilitate inducing the writer's position in the reader's mind. The ideological format of the magazine perfectly involves various technologies of 'brainwashing'. Language manipulation in the type of discourse under the study is mostly based on the hidden possibilities of the language. Among stylistic devices a considerable role is played by rhetoric questions, metaphors, a specific choice of words, and means of text arrangement; means of suggestion include such manipulative techniques as the creation of displaced comparisons, lexical reiterations, false contrapositions, and the use of equivocal language.

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