

LITERATURE REVIEW OF EUPHEMISMS IN AMERICAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract: *The article analyzes the euphemistic substitutions used in political texts based on the material of the Western mass media. A review of various interpretations of the concept of "political discourse" is conducted. The author provides a number of examples demonstrating the veiled meaning of statements used in political media texts and speeches by American politicians. The ways of influencing the mass consciousness of native speakers are being studied. The ability of euphemisms is taken into account not only to neutralize the negative meaning according to generally accepted political correctness, but also to purposefully change the meaning of the utterance in order to achieve the necessary communicative effect. In order to find out how to exert implicit influence through political euphemisms, a study of the American media is being conducted, in particular The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today, CNN International.*

Keywords: *political euphemisms, political discourse, mass consciousness, R*

INTRODUCTION

In modern English-language political discourse, the use of euphemistic substitutions is of particular importance, contributing to the observance of political correctness and mitigation of the true state of things. It should be noted that political correctness is an integral part of the ideology of the United States, striving for tolerance, equality of rights, democratization and elimination of discrimination. As a result, the information field is saturated with lexical units that mask undesirable concepts in society, often related to racial, religious, gender, cultural and other differences.

The phenomenon of euphemia has been studied in detail from different angles, taking into account sociolinguistic and functional aspects. Such scientists as A.M. Katsev, L.P. Krysin, V.P. Moskvina, V.I. Zabolotkina, D.J. Enright, N.A. Rees, J.S. Neaman, C.G. Silver³ dealt with the classification of euphemisms and their role in the lexical space of the language. We have previously analyzed the definitions of euphemisms and their impact on

³ Заболоткина В.И. Новая лексика современного английского языка: учеб. пособие для ин-тов и фак. иностр. яз. М.: Высш. шк. 1989. 126 с

the formation of native speakers' value orientations⁴. As for this study, our goal is to study euphemisms from the point of view of their functioning in American political discourse, taking into account the veiling techniques used in political communication in order to reduce negative overtones and influence mass consciousness.

Excerpts from English-language media such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today, and CNN International served as the material for the study. The choice of these publications is explained by their sufficient popularity and credibility among native speakers. More than 150 texts published between 2019 and 2021 were analyzed.

Political discourse and political correctness. It should be noted that the political arena is currently the most relevant place for the functioning of euphemisms. This is due to the constant demonstration of military potential, the representation of influencing opportunities and the strengthening of rules of public communicative behavior. In this regard, American political discourse deserves a detailed study due to the well-known events taking place in the United States that affect the political situation in the world. It should be noted that the veiled meaning of euphemistic statements in American political discourse is determined by a strategy of avoiding the truth and hiding unpleasant phenomena of reality⁵.

Political discourse, as a form of political communication, acts as a special type of discourse due to political influence both inside and outside the country. As a result, such areas of government activity as domestic and foreign policy are being formed. Thus, communication carried out in these areas is often aimed at creating a positive image of the government in the mass consciousness.

The concept of political discourse is complex and multidimensional, and has been studied by such scientists as A.N. Baranov, V.I. Karasik, E.I. Sheigal, N.A. Kupina, A.P. Chudinov, M.L. Geis, and others. According to one definition, political discourse is a set of any speech acts used in political debates⁶; on the other hand, this term refers to all speech formations, the content of which relates to the political sphere. In turn, T. Van Dijk understands political discourse as the interaction of politicians, implemented in the form of government documents, parliamentary debates, party programs and speeches by politicians. Some scholars consider political discourse in terms of its similarity to ideological discourse. Thus, according to Yu.A. Sorokin, political discourse is a specific kind

⁴ Кондратенко Е.Н. Эвфемизмы и дисфемизмы как близкие по значению слова (на материале новостных порталов сети интернет) [Электронный ресурс] // Теория языка и межкультурная коммуникация. 2018. № 4 (31). Режим доступа: <http://tl-ic.kursksu.ru/pdf/031-014.pdf> (дата обращения: 25.09.2021).

⁵ Баскова Ю.С. Манипуляция в языке СМИ: эвфемизмы как «слова-прикрытия». Краснодар: КСЭИ, 2009. 182 с.

⁶ Баранов А.Н., Казакевич Е.Г. Парламентские дебаты: традиции и новации. М.: Знание, 1991. 64 с.

of ideological discourse. The difference lies in the fact that political discourse is pragmatic explicitly, while ideological discourse is implicit⁷.

Thus, political discourse is characterized as an important part of socio-political relations with its complex system of knowledge and actions. At the same time, political communication is determined not only by linguistic verbal and non-verbal means, but also by extralinguistic factors that are determined by value characteristics and cognitive processes taking place in society. Political discourse, as a rule, includes such forms of written and oral communication as public appearances, political shows, contracts, election campaigns, newspaper articles, comments on publications, conferences, interviews, etc. We believe that varieties of political communication aimed at a mass audience are more suitable for studying the functioning of euphemisms in political discourse. The mass media, which play a significant role in influencing the consciousness of native speakers, are often called upon to cope with this task. With the help of the media, public opinion is constantly subjected to the imposition of stereotypes and the propaganda of views and ideas. For more effective management of mass consciousness in political communication, euphemistic substitutions are used, designed to perform tasks of the following nature:

- mitigation of the negative meaning of a particular statement;
- an implicit way of transmitting information;
- compliance with legal restrictions;
- Following the rules of cultural and political correctness.

It should be noted that political discourse contains certain ideological views, including the ideology of political correctness. This linguistic and cultural behavioral phenomenon originated in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States due to the need to find lexical units suitable for a certain situation, replacing those that offend someone's feelings and dignity, infringe on rights, put a person in an uncomfortable position and discriminate against him in relation to race, gender, social affiliation, and health limitations, appearance, etc. Politicians and journalists often have to comply with the norms of political correctness in order to communicate effectively, which leads to the use of words that distort objective reality, soften and often substitute the true lexical meanings. Due to the fact that political communication most often takes place in public and may relate to potentially conflicting issues, both political and public life, the speaker is forced to carefully choose language formulations. As a result, the speeches of political figures contain linguistic means to hide the negative aspects of the phenomena of the surrounding world. So, in the speech of Steve Cohen, a congressman, a member of the Progressive Congressional Faction, one can see the camouflage of negative meanings with the help of positively evaluative lexemes: "They have good attitudes and good instincts and good goals. But they haven't been legislators, most of them, for a very long period of

⁷ Sorokin Yu.A. Political discourse: an attempt to interpret the concept // Political discourse in Russia: Materials of a workshop (Russia, Moscow, March 30, 1997). Moscow: NIOPIK, 1997. pp. 57-62.

time and a lot of them have been activists and try to get things in other ways» ["Close the deal": Biden struggles ... [http](#)]. However, despite the use of positive connotations, there is an implicit negative connotation hinting at the incompetence of other members of Congress. As another example, here is an excerpt from an article about an aide to former US President Donald Trump: "He earned plaudits for reducing the staff infighting and bringing some semblance of order to a White House where an open door to the Oval Office symbolized a table of organization with no clear lines of authority [White House under John Kelly . [http](#)]. According to the text, we see that the president's staff manager has earned the praise of "earned plaudits," but then there is a critical attitude towards the situation due to the expressions "some semblance" - some semblance of order and "with no clear lines of authority" - without clear lines of authority.

Today, the influence of political correctness on the lexical composition of the language is obvious. According to D. Adler, the main trend in modern English is its inclusive nature, the desire not to offend anyone by using any careless word or expression [Adler 1994]. Thus, lexical units that go beyond the limits of politically correct views are replaced by new "inclusive" concepts in order to avoid infringing on someone's rights.

The manipulative function of euphemisms in political discourse. An important aspect of the use of euphemisms is their manipulative function, which allows them to implicitly influence the mass consciousness. For example, the United States appears in the global understanding as a superpower capable of regulating conflicts at the international level and influencing the domestic policies of other countries. The implementation of the manipulative function in this case is based on the following techniques:

- incomplete provision of information in the case of only some part of the genuine data being advertised, as a result of which the distribution of the reality picture is uneven;
- combining reality with assumptions and speculation, which causes difficulties in perceiving the text and separating incorrect information from the correct one.;
- delayed presentation of facts, delaying the presentation of the current state of affairs until such time as this information becomes irrelevant;
- deliberately incorrect, but predictable news, the content of which meets the expectations of the audience.

Thus, in the process of using euphemistic substitutions in political discourse, a kind of manipulation is observed, in which the nature of the perception of the denotation changes. For example, the political discourse of the United States is characterized by an exaggeration of its own role in solving world problems. In the following example of political discourse, one can note the emphasis on the US desire to defeat the global pandemic almost solely by its own efforts: "White House officials have pushed back on the criticism and said they can provide booster shots while also continuing its efforts to help vaccinate the globe. Officials like White House Covid-19 response director Jeff Zients and US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy have stressed the importance of doing both at the same time in order to end the global pandemic» [US to donate ...[http](#)]. It can be assumed that the so-

called help in vaccinating the whole world means, among other things, spreading its influence and interfering in the politics of other countries.

Since the United States is a multinational country, its political discourse is characterized by euphemistic substitutions used in resolving racial conflicts and mentioning national minorities. It should be noted that during active economic, socio-political and cultural periods in the life of society, conditions are formed that provoke a close interaction of language and reality⁸. Thus, as a result of the recent riots related to the oppression of the African-American population of the United States, the language has been supplemented with the following concepts, expressed in the form of hashtags: #blacklivesmatter, #whitelivesmatter #alllivesmatter. These expressions are intended to convey to society the information that the life of any person is important in the world, regardless of the color of his skin.

Increasingly, the euphemism segregation has become common in the American media, denoting the forced separation of people into racial, ethnic or other groups in everyday life. So, according to an excerpt from a publication in the New York Times, it was only after major ethnic conflicts in Alabama that the idea arose of correcting the state's education law, which implies separate education for children of different skin colors: "The most egregious piece of writing within the constitution is probably familiar to some, and states: "Separate schools shall be provided for white and colored children, and no child of either race shall be allowed to attend a school of the other race," where the euphemism colored refers to black children. The article goes on to express a desire to get rid of remnants of the past and racial discrimination: "The changes would mark the end of the last remaining legal remnants of what are generally referred to as Jim Crow laws, which created a state-sponsored education system separated by race, and in which the Constitution allowed state authorities to forcibly take place." children in the educational institution of the state's choosing" [Alabama begins... [http](#)]. The author of the publication, using such formulations as the most egregious piece of writing and the last remaining legal remnants, tries to lead the reader to the idea that today such racial division in schools is unacceptable and is a residual problem of previous years.

Pre-election political discourse also uses veiled subtexts in order to influence the mass consciousness. So, in the political debate for the post of mayor of New York, one of the candidates says the following: «We don't need a manager, we need a visionary» [N.Y.C. Mayor's race ...[http](#)], hinting that his opponent, who worked as an agency manager before the election, is not suitable for the role of head of such a large city. A quote from The Washington Post is also of interest: "... Trump was getting advice about blocking certification of the election from a lawyer he had first seen on television and the president's actions were so unsettling that his top general and the House speaker discussed the nuclear chain of command» [Trump's false .[http](#)], demonstrating an

⁸ Lebedeva S.V. Synonyms or proxonyms. Kursk: Publishing House of the Kursk State Pedagogical University. University, 2002. 203 p.

ironically negative attitude towards former US President Donald Trump. This passage shows that using euphemisms, you can not offend directly, but at the same time show a person from an unsightly side. Using the expressions so unsettling, a lawyer he had first seen on television, the author of the article points to the incompetence of Donald Trump, who uses unverified information and does not think about the consequences of his actions. The humor of the phrase discussed the nuclear chain of command is that the actions of the former US president were so reckless that his security service began to prepare for a nuclear war.

Political euphemisms are also characterized by the formation of a "friend-foe" opposition [Budaev, Chudinov 2008: 77]. This opposition is formed on an axiological basis, placing "one's own" on the positive side of the scale, and "someone else's" on the opposite, i.e. negative. Such a distribution is highly inherent in political discourse, within the framework of which conflict situations and foreign policy relations are realized. As S.V. believes. Lebedeva, the real reality determines the properties and qualities of the objects being compared, including according to the criterion of "own"/"alien", contributing to the completion of creating the image a person needs [Lebedeva 2002]. It will be relevant here to give an example of the confrontation between the United States and Russia, in particular, during the recent events related to hacker attacks on American websites. Naturally, in the texts of the American media, the US government is on the positive side, while the Russian government is on the negative side, as evidenced by the following excerpt from CNN: "Russia is conspicuously absent from the meetings as the White House tries to make progress in bilateral talks with Moscow" [US calls on Russia. [http](#)]. Based on the content of the excerpt, Russian representatives are absent from meetings dedicated to solving the problem of virus attacks, which apparently indicates disrespect towards the North American partner. In turn, representatives of the White House are trying to make progress in bilateral negotiations with Moscow, which, apparently, should position them in a positive and evaluative context.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the examples of euphemization in political discourse we have cited demonstrate the manipulative function of euphemisms by belittling, covert or explicit criticism, veiling or mitigating negative phenomena, as well as the "friend-foe" opposition. An analysis of American print media confirms that issues related to intra-government relations, election campaigns, ethnic and racial conflicts, as well as foreign policy issues, tend to become key topics in media texts. The latter, in turn, being part of the political discourse, often embellish reality, adhere to the rules of political correctness, have an orienting effect on the mass consciousness and contribute to the dissemination of certain views and ideas.

We can conclude that the functioning of euphemistic substitutions in American political discourse is due to the replacement of words or expressions that do not meet the communicative goals of the author of the text with more appropriate ones. As a result,

there is an exclusion of direct nomination of phenomena that can cause a negative reaction, hurt feelings or violate the rights of the recipient. Such euphemisms are often used as manipulative language tools that can direct the audience's opinion in the right direction for the addressee.

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