phraseological units in political communication (based on electronic mass media sources)

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ABSTRACT

In the modern age of globalization and wealth of information, when interest in politics is growing, the study of political discourse, its typology and genre features, basic concepts of politics, phraseological semantics and syntaxes of political texts gains importance. Based on the anthropological and linguocultural approaches, political discourse is considered as a multi-faceted complex of speech actions in the socio-cultural and historical space, the achievement of which depends on the choice of linguistic means, among whom phraseological units are of great significance. The article is aimed at analyzing the functioning of phraseological units in political texts presented by Russian and English electronic media. Comparative discourse analysis implemented in the research helped to demonstrate the phraseology of political texts and identify general characteristics of the use of political phraseological units in two genetically non-relative languages. As the analysis showed, the main features of phraseological units in political communication include informative saturation, emotional coloring and evaluation, figurativeness, violation of the principle of impenetrability and high degree of variability. In both Russian and English electronic publications, the main function of phraseological units is to make political language expressive, actualize the key message of the text, expand the structural, semantic and stylistic boundaries of political phraseology.

KEY words: linguistics, political communication, phraseological unit, mass media, discourse analysis

1. Introduction

In recent years, linguistic science has mostly focused on the discourse of active social groups, in particular, politicians. According to Nikulina, what distinguishes politics from other areas of human activity is its predominantly discursive nature: the majority of political actions are inherently speech actions [11, 147].

The success of the policy often depends on well-constructed political communication, and power strategies are formed with regard to the communicative component [13, 244]. A well-known Russian scientist Chudinov points out, that political discourse possesses a special linguistic sign system intended for political communication; aimed at advancing certain ideas, having emotional impact on citizens and inducing them to political actions, developing public consensus, adopting and justifying socio-political decisions [4, 6]. Another scientist in the field of political communication Maslova notes that political discourse is verbal communication in a certain socio-psychological context, in which the sender and the recipient are endowed with certain social roles according to their participation in political life, which is the subject of communication [10, 43].
Anthropological and linguoculturological approaches, that are getting increasing importance in modern linguistics, allow us to consider political discourse as a multivariate body of speech actions in the socio-cultural and historical platforms, which reflects the socio-ideological consciousness of the linguistic society. Sheygal regards political language as a resource open to every member of the linguistic community, connected with the specific use of a nationwide language as a means of control and persuasion [14]. Political text through which this communication takes place contains a whole range of linguistic and extralinguistic techniques, strategies and tactics. Parshina notes that in a political text, linguistic manipulation is the main goal of communication, the achievement of which is guided by the choice of linguistic means [12, 23].

Political media text is largely aimed at linguistic manipulation which can be successfully achieved by means of phraseological units - semantically complete and figuratively motivated phrases that are changelessly reproduced in speech. On the one hand, phraseological units are means of expressing the national-cultural vision of the world of a certain nation; on the other hand, they are linguistic tools that facilitate full communication in the intercultural media space. Moreover, phraseological units are ideally suited for the implementation of such important system-forming characteristics of political discourse as manipulativeness, semantic uncertainty, evaluativity, figurativeness, speech compression.

2 Methods and Methodology
2.1. Research objectives
In order to carry out the comparative study of phraseological units under study we stated the following objectives:
- to review the existing works devoted to the research topic and analyze the main approaches to studying political discourse and political communication in foreign and Russian linguistics;
- to reveal the functioning and expressive potential of phraseological units in political media;
- to analyze the key features of phraseological units in Russian and English political media texts.

2.2. Theoretical and empirical methods
Our research is based on the following key methods:
- theoretical methods of analysis and synthesis, including the analysis of the theoretical literature devoted to the research problem and generating the reviewed linguistic knowledge into the relevant research approach;
- empirical methods including the comparative method devoted to identifying general characteristics of the use of political phraseological units in genetically distant languages; discourse analysis, aimed at revealing the specifics of the language of the media text from specific political, cultural and historical standpoints followed by the interpretation of the indicated characteristics of phraseological units; continuous sampling method intended for selecting supporting data.

2.3 Body of data

3. Results
Modern political discourse is characterized by the use of two types of phraseological units: a) those that indicate exclusively political issues (pervoye litso (first person), politika dvoynykh standartov (double-standard politics), diplomatiya bol’shoy dubinki (big baton diplomacy), zakulisnye peregovory (backstage negotiations), carrot-and-stick diplomacy, stand in elections, splintered party, peace table, war on coal) and b) those that describe other areas of society (vybrat’ sya iz tupika (breaking the deadlock), ispytyvat’ na prochnost’ (test to destruction), dvigat’ sya v pravil’nom napravlenii (move on the right way), brosat’ vozov (issue challenge), stand shoulder-to-shoulder, big-money donor, hit a nerve. The analysis showed a significant quantitative predominance of phraseological units of “non-political” nature, which can be explained by the intention of both Russian and English media to mix up purely political content of texts with linguistic means more familiar and close to ordinary readers that they can easily recall from memory.

Basko notes that one of the key features of phraseological unit as a linguistic tool providing intercultural communication is bigger informative saturation than their synonymous word [3, 177]. The meaning of idioms is always richer than the meaning of a synonymous word (or words). And this means that the meaning of idioms always contains more details than words [16, 13]. For example, Rus. krasnaya cherta has the synonymous words granitsa, rubezh, which mean a dividing line that cannot be crossed. Having become popular in the 20-21th centuries’ political discourse, the expression also denotes the limit of patience of one of the contracting parties; that means the point, while violating which “security is no longer guaranteed”. In order to keep the opponent from any irreversible action,
usually an open statement is made by the head of state or his proxy, which involves a lengthy preliminary discussion. “V SHA perehli krasnuyu chertu, Iranskaya natsiya v podkhodyashchee vremya v blizhayshem budushchem reshitel’no otvetit na eto,” — privodyat’ye yego slova (prem’yer-ministra strany Ali Rabii) v Telegram-kanale pravitel’stva. (The USA has crossed the red line, the Iranian nation will decisively respond to this in the near future,” his words (Prime Minister Ali Rabiya’s) are quoted in the government’s Telegram channel.) The English idiom cut corners has the synonyms save, economize, that express reasonable expenses, the desire to save the possessions, thrift, cost savings. However, the idiom also refers to dishonorable actions of a person / group of people / a company to save the preserving fortune, which negatively affects the company’s reputation. “Rolls-Royce has denied claims it “cut corners on quality-control requirements” and lied to customers”.

Figurativeness of the phraseological unit clearly represents a fragment or phenomenon of reality shaped by human knowledge about it; contains stereotypical or associative representations of the people or different paradoxes about the surrounding world. Semantically, most political phraseological units contain a typical image based on a metaphorical transfer, which intensifies their expressive potential. For example, in the political context, the Russian phraseological unit postanovka na yako’r means the initial position of the parties at the start of negotiations, which is likely to slow down negotiations in case the circumstances change and prevent from reaching an agreement. We can see that the image of an anchor as a structure for holding a ship or other floating object in one place is projected in the meaning of this political phrase. Another Russian phraseological unit koloss na glinyanuykh nogakh expresses something majestic in appearance, but essentially weak. The origin of this expression is connected with the Old Testament, which refers to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, who dreamed of a huge metal idol on clay legs, which was broken by a stone. The image of such a colossus was attached to the Russian Empire in the 18-19th centuries and was later used in relation to the Soviet Union in the Western European press. K sozhaleniyu, uroki istorii bystro zabyvayutsya. Kogda obshchayus’i zapadnymi deyatelyami, ya vsegda napominayu im: Napoleon i Hitler ved’ tozhe schitali Rossiyu kolossom na glinyanykh nogakh, i chto iz etogo vshlo? (Unfortunately, history lessons are quickly forgotten. When I communicate with Western actors, I always remind them: Napoleon and Hitler also considered Russia a colossus on clay feet, and what came of it?)

The phrase witch hunt, widely used in American political media, has the meaning of “persecute, hunt for witches,” which historically dates back to the 15-17th centuries, when Europeans suffering from economic crisis, famine, plague and crop failure, began to connect the cause of the misfortune with witchcraft. Consequently, thousands of people suspected of witchcraft were prosecuted and executed. The image of medieval witches, sorcerers and persecutions shaped the semantic basis of the English expression witch hunt in the middle of the 20th century, when mass persecution of Americans with communist views began and, in modern political discourse the phrase means campaigns to discredit any social groups for political or other reasons without due evidence or reason. Donald Trump has claimed that the recent focus on Russia’s alleged cyber-meddling in the US election amounts to a ‘political witch hunt’.

Another feature of political phraseological units is their emotional coloring and evaluation. Most phraseologisms express either a positive or negative evaluation of a fragment of reality. According to Arsent’eva, “approving or disapproving evaluation in the meaning of phraseological units, can be explained by the differentiated attitude of people to positive and negative phenomena and is integrated in the semantic structure of phraseological units” [2, 40]. For example, Russian phrases bezgalstuchnaya diplomatiya “with the use of military force”, politika dvynykh standartov “contradictory / inconsistent policy”, golosovat’ nogami “not to go to the polls”, polivat’ gryazyu “to publicly stipulate another person”; English idioms pipe lay “engage in political fraud”, fall flat on one’s face / fail spectacularly “unexpectedly fail or make an embarrassing mistake” express the negative opinion of the speaker about the named actions or objects. Examples of phraseological units with positive evaluation are: in Russian derzhat’ marku “to comply with accepted standards, maintain dignity”, idti v goru “to achieve an increasingly high position”, zavoyeyvat’ priznaniye “to gain success or support from the rest”; in English make rapid strides “make significant progress or advances”, carry an election “to win the election”, etc. We have found out that in the political media in both languages there are more phraseological units with negative evaluation than with positive evaluation. Some scientists explain the prevalence of phrases with disapproving evaluation by the fact that “a person constantly has to overcome disadvantages, mistakes, and the sad. That’s why it is so significant for him and so clearly reflected in the language. As for the positive, it is taken for granted [5, 160].

In political communication, violation of the principle of impenetrability of phraseological units can be observed. The principle of impenetrability provides phraseological units with structural stability and monolithicity, which make them easily predictable during communication. For example, we usually say in Russian prislushatsya k golosu razuma, vyvod na rezhim, protyagivat’ ruku pomoschi or in English look the facts in the face, cling to power, take a wrecking ball, but not the other way. However, inclusion of some components or specifying words in the structure of the phraseological unit is a stylistic device aimed at creating a certain effect, which is demonstrated by the following sentences. Schitayu nize svoego dostoinstva opuskat’sya do gryaznykh razborok i kopniya v gryaznom chuzhom bel’ye..., - opravdyvayetsya Igor’ Lebedev. (I consider below my dignity to stoop to dirty show downs and dig
in someone else's dirty underwear .... Igor Lebedev justifies himself.) The prime minister keeps serving uprehashed Brexit promises, but they get ever harder to swallow.

It should be noted that phraseological units in political discourse are highly variable and undergo various types of transformations, which are observed at lexicogrammatical, syntactic and semantic levels. According to Verbitchkaya, “variability is an obligatory feature of the language, it is determined by the language, imposed by it” [17, 15]. Purposeful modification of the monolithic structure and semantics of phraseological units is aimed at enhancing their expressive function. The transformation of phraseological units not only creates the effect of surprise and brings them freshness of perception, but also demonstrates the dynamism of the development of the language [18, 152].

The research showed that in the Russian and English political discourses there are more transformations of the lexical and grammatical level, among which are the use of substantive components, different prepositions, singular and plural, perfect and imperfect forms of the verb; the use of synonymous words; the presence or absence of the adjective; substitution based on antonymic series. For example, in the following sentences we can see the use of synonymous words: singular and plural, Saovory paketa Klishasa vsluh pokutsya o national’noy bezopasnosti, a v ume, nado dumat’, derzhat vozmoznost’ zaknut’ rty opozitsionnym media… (The co-authors of the Klishas package loudly care about national security, but one must think, they keep in their minds the possibility to shut up the mouths of the opposition media …) - Valensa zayavil, chto «ne pozvolit zakryt’ sebe roty, dobavit vesheche neskol’ko postov v sotssetyakh, razoblachayushchikh uze ne tol’ko obstoyatel’stva aviakatastrofy, no i reshenyi suda. (Walesa said that he would “not allow to shut his mouth,” adding a few more posts on social networks that expose not only the circumstances of the crash, but also the court decision.)

The following English sentences contain different verbs, which add more specific details to the meaning of the phraseological units. Ukraine-born Parmas worked with Giuliani to execute Trump's alleged Ukrainian pressure campaign, which Trump’s critics contend was aimed at getting dirt on his political rival, Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden. President Trump delayed military aid to the Kiev government in a quid pro quo to pressure the Ukrainian president to dig up dirt on the Bidens. A London professor was last night dragged into a special inquiry into Russian interference in the US presidential election over allegations the Kremlin had “dirt” on Hillary Clinton, the Democratic candidate.

4. Discussions

Political discourse is a certain type of practical linguistic activity that does not only occur in various political processes, but also occupies a significant part of a person’s “informational life”. The founder of the text theory Van Dijk believes that political discourse plays a key role in the exercise of power, as it expresses social knowledge, and therefore, can “control the minds” of social groups and their members [6, 71].

Politics takes an important part in the life of a contemporary person, and his attitude to political issues and events is mainly shaped by the mass media [7; 1; 2; 3; 4; 8]. As a result of globalization, media has become an integral part of the social life of a modern person and is able to unite states and peoples, and form a single audience around the world. Thus, at present, one of the most common forms of the existence of a language is media texts, the study of which offers a comprehensive, integrated approach to the analysis of media words. Mass media periodicals and electronic publications are most interesting, since most newspaper and magazine articles reflect the ideological picture of our time, the main events of political life via linguistic means of influencing a mass audience.

That is why it is reasonable to consider political media discourse as one of the sources for the analysis of phraseological units. Language, culture, history and world view of a particular ethnic group are most closely intertwined within the framework of phraseology. Soboleva notes that phraseological units refract fragments of reality by means of figurative and expressive-evaluative perception of phenomena important for an ethnics [15, 139]. Andreyeva, Korneva, Sakhibullina regard phraseologisms specific units of the language, as they contain cultural information about the history and everyday life of people speaking the language [1, 427]. According to Kirillova, phraseological units are a projection of the world in linguistic consciousness, which forms its linguistic picture of the world in each language [9, 14].

So, phraseological units act not only as markers of the national and cultural uniqueness of the people, but also as a powerful means of influencing the addressee, which is the aim of political discourse.

5. Conclusion

Phraseologisms are unique linguistic means that are able to actualize the main purpose of the text, diversify its informative capabilities, create new images and associations, thereby arouse the audience’s interest in to facts of political reality. The main features of phraseological units in political discourse are informative saturation, emotional coloring and evaluation, figurativeness, violation of the principle of impenetrability and high degree of variability. In both Russian and English electronic media, the main function of phraseological units is to make the political language expressive and emotional, expand the structural-semantic and stylistic boundaries of political phraseology.
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