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PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS AS A MEANS OF INFORMATION
COMPRESSION IN THE AMERICAN ELECTION DISCOURSE

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Phraseological units are perhaps one of the most visible manifestations of language manipulation. Although phraseology has always been regarded as a powerful source of influencing people's minds, relatively little is known about the way one perceives and interprets a phraseological unit which has accumulated a great deal of knowledge and experience of many generations since it was first implemented. This paper attempts to classify the types of this information compression bringing the American election discourse to the center of attention. Firstly, we identify phraseological units among various manipulative means, including those that were subject to any kind of transformation and, therefore, are difficult to detect. Secondly, we seek to categorize these phraseological units according to the "impression" they make on the addressee. Thus, the final stage of the analysis is to estimate which type of information compression via phraseological units is the most popular while manipulating. The findings reveal the enormous potential of phraseological units as a means of information compression to modify the behavior, views, and attitude to things as well as give an idea of something by making the addressee visualize it. The results show the latter's significance in the information perception by the addressee.

Keywords: language manipulation, election discourse, information compression, phraseological units, visualization

Introduction

Some peculiarities of the election discourse determine considerable number of manipulative means in its body. In the modern world one of the most wide-spread and effective ways to manipulate in politics is the language manipulation.

Within the scope of the article the supreme attention will be devoted to one of the functions of phraseological units which reveals their capacity to reduce the number of language resources while producing an utterance. The actuality of information compression is due to the tendency of the election discourse



to impart as much as it could be within a limited period of time. As a result, the main objective of this article is to consider the scheme of information compression based on the indispensable figurative nature of such units.

Literature Review

The generally accepted notion of discourse may be interpreted as the interconnection between the information conditioned by the communicative situation and the one conveyed in the text. According to N. Arutyunova, discourse is a textual unity which combines extralinguistic, pragmatic and other factors. Communicative situation is regarded as a part of culture and the discourse analysis based on revealing and explaining its hidden senses inevitably faces some cultural and behavioral “constraints” which obtain some social, group or ethnocultural significance [1, p. 136–137]. E. Kubryakova suggests that discourse structure involves knowledge of speech and speech activity, a number of discourse participants, socially-, culturally- and personally-bounded pragmatic conditions of its production and carefully selected language. All these factors generate new reality, reveal the addresser’s intentions and influence other participants of the communicative act [10, p. 31–32].

One of the assumptions of this paper is predetermined by the works of V. Chernyavskaya. The author sees discourse as a power expressing itself via the system of interconnected ways of influencing in speech / text [3, p. 81]. Any discourse can be viewed as a complex of speech acts. As a matter of fact, every speech act is aimed at fulfilling some particular function. However, it should be noticed that speech acts are always a part of the general idea of this or that discourse and its realization. The key role in achieving the goals belongs to the functions fulfilled by the speech communication. N. Fairclough speaks about the communicative behaviour which consists of the action, the representation and the identification [8, p. 28]. The representation, by E. Sidorov, is a complex of social and personality-determined discourses whose organization mainly depends on the level of language and the cognitive skills the speakers have alongside their experience in life and interaction, social standing, values, ideals, stereotypes, prejudice and goals [22, p. 60–64].

If the representation is successful, the identification will go the way the addresser needs it to. Thus, it can be regarded as a kind of manipulation. The most common notion people have about manipulation is connected with its psychological essence. V. Sheinov considers manipulation to be a latent regulation which the manipulator applies to the unsuspecting addressee. As a result, the manipulator gains benefits on their side [23, p. 5]. Other authors also underline that manipulation is based on the principle when the manipulated are completely unaware of being manipulated in order to be taken advantage of their choice against their will, intentions or opinion [9; 20; 24].

Our ideas of life, incentives and behaviour according to G. Schiller are strongly conditioned by manipulation [21, p. 19]. One of the most significant researchers of this problem E. Dotsenko defines manipulation as a means of psychological influence. Provided that this psychological influence is exerted properly, it may lead to other people having the intentions they are not actually supposed to have or even the ones that contradict their real intentions [7, p. 58]. In fact, one of the most thorough definitions of psychological manip-



ulation is provided by O. Mikhalyova. She tends to think that it aims to urge the addressee to commit some predetermined actions. It can be implemented by means of creating the idea of something which is likely to be different from the one the addressee would get on their own [14, p. 143]. On the whole, the phenomenon of manipulation can be explained as a latent influence, control or even force that does not coincide with the will, intentions or plans of people it has been designed for.

Having analyzed some works of election discourse researchers, it can be concluded that the election discourse features periodicity, a variety of candidates, a deeper extend of aggressiveness, dynamics and inspiration due to the timing, and remarkable and recognizable images of politicians. Thus, election discourse is to be regarded as a structural speech activity limited by the time provided for one election campaign and intended to influence the potential voter by means of a more intensive use of some language tools. The speaker concentrates on the content of the message while the listener focuses on the outer envelope which they are supposed to extract the implied meaning from [26, p. 10]. Regarding this fact, a lot depends on the right choice the speaker makes when picking up the language. It means the language used is not random. The ability of words both to reflect and form the psychological experience adds to this a great deal. Dilts claims that it makes them a mighty weapon of thought and other conscious and unconscious processes [5, p. 16–17].

The author's concern is to investigate phraseological units which undoubtedly stand out in a large diversity of language means. Such units are seen as profoundly complex in both structure and meaning. Firstly, all the components are interdependent and make a whole. Consequently, being treated separately they lose their unique meaning. All of the above makes them highly expressive and vivid.

Materials and Methods

The material for the analysis was the corpus of 350 pages A4 representing the candidates' monologues' transcripts during the 2012 USA election campaign. It resulted in 57 units of analysis which are semantically-complete text fragments. Each of them contains a phraseological unit and the context required to figure out the true meaning of the latter. It is explained by the fact that it is impossible to fulfill the phraseological analysis without the context [27, p. 7].

Phraseological units were selected according to their functioning in the American election discourse. Their main or supplementary function is to be information compression.

Results

The results of the investigation show that information compression is realized by the speaker when there is a coincidence between the visual characteristics of the described and its essence.

(1) *"Let's not just talk about honoring our veterans; let's put our money where our mouth is. That's why I'm running for a second term"* [18]. The phraseological unit "to put one's money where someone's mouth is" creates an image which



closely correlates with the real action. First of all, "mouth" is an organ that turns thoughts into recognizable sounds. Secondly, the metaphorical meaning of "mouth" may be regarded as a synonym to speech itself. It is proved by numerous collocations, for instance, "keep your mouth shut", "have a loud mouth", etc. The definition analysis reveals the implications of this phraseological unit: to give or spend money or take some action in order to do or support something that one has been talking about [13], to do something rather than to just talk about it [25].

(2) *"Last night he said he always supported taking out Osama bin Laden, but in 2007, he said it wasn't worth moving heaven and earth to catch one man"* [19]. The phraseological unit "to move heaven and earth" is a deliberate hyperbole designed to evoke associations with some strenuous efforts required to get the desirable. The speaker's objective is to draw the listener's attention to the fact that the opponent used to consider the hunt for Osama Ben Laden to be supererogatory and unjustified. Later on, he surprisingly rooted for his liquidation. The phraseological unit enables the speaker to convey the main idea briefly. It concentrates the addressee's attention on the opponent's unreliability proved by the rapid change of their priorities.

(3) *"At a time when millions of Americans are struggling to keep their heads above water economically, at a time when senior poverty is increasing, at a time when millions of kids are living in dire poverty, my Republican colleagues, as part of their recently-passed budget, are trying to make a terrible situation even worse"* [30]. The phraseological unit "to keep one's head above water" pictures what any person would do, if they happened to be drowning. Keeping the head above water is the way to survive. The adverb "economically" may be found useless in this context where the very phraseological unit means "in easy circumstances" [11, p. 798], "to avoid financial failure while having money problems" [13], "to just be able to manage, especially when you have financial difficulties" [2]. However, it was used intentionally. The adverb is included in the speech to emphasise the main idea which is the criticism of the financial policy of the government. It should be added that the gravity of the financial situation in the country is revealed through such negative attributes of "poverty" as "increasing" and "dire". Moreover, judgments like «make a terrible situation even worse» also add to reinforce the point the speaker is making.

(4) *"President Obama has thrown allies like Israel under the bus, even as he has relaxed sanctions on Castro's Cuba. He abandoned our friends in Poland by walking away from our missile defense commitments, but is eager to give Russia's President Putin the flexibility he desires, after the election. Under my administration, our friends will see more loyalty, and Mr. Putin will see a little less flexibility and more backbone"* [15]. The literal meaning of the phraseological unit "to throw somebody under the bus" is quite revealing by itself and one would probably guess it means something worth reproof. Collins Dictionary defines it as follows: "to expose someone to an unpleasant fate, especially in order to save oneself" [4]. Having inserted "Israel" in the middle of it, the speaker makes it clear that it is this country the USA are being deceitful and unfriendly to in spite of the fact that Israel is the ally. Nevertheless, the speaker's objective is hidden much deeper and not as obvious as it may seem. The speaker is willing to ingratiate themselves with the American Jewry which is rather



mighty in this country. For good measure, its significance for the candidates is doubtless as Israel is scarcely ignored in election speeches. The reason for which the phraseological unit is used may also be to underline the speaker's disapproval of the president's foreign policy. The opponent's political faults are indicated via such remarks as "abandoned our friends" or "eager to give Russia's President Putin the flexibility". It should be said that alongside various means of manipulation the speaker exploits opposition to resist the political enemy. They claim when they come to power, America's "friends will see more loyalty" (Israel is the friend) whereas "Mr. Putin will see a little less flexibility and more backbone" (Putin is the enemy).

(5) *"I'm running to pay down our debt in a way that's balanced and responsible. Now, I know Governor Romney came to Des Moines last week; warned about a "prairie fire of debt". That's what he said. But he left out some facts"* [17]. The collocation "prairie fire" is a part of the phraseological unit "to spread like a prairie fire" that is "to spread rapidly or flash-like" [11, p. 710]. Any fire, especially a prairie fire, is likely to be associated with something disastrous or destructive. The speaker quotes his opponent's speech where "prairie fire of debt" was used to exaggerate the amount of money owed by the government and demonise the context in general. Being accused of this "prairie fire of debt" the speaker is trying to make excuses. He is meticulous in the choice of words to get the desired result which is to ridicule what has been said. He manages to do it by mocking the fact he has been «warned» about the profound number of his own debts.

(6) *"Obamacare is a wolf in wolf's clothing – it's expensive, intrusive and unconstitutional"* [16]. A wolf has always been a wild animal, a beast to dread. The phraseological unit "a wolf in wolf's clothing" originates from "a wolf in sheep's clothing" which means someone who cloaks a hostile intention with a friendly manner [13]. It is usually the case for phraseological units to describe things figuratively. However, in this example the speaker deliberately deprives it of any ambiguity. Thus, the phraseological unit becomes explicit and its negative meaning gets even more unmistakable due to such adjectives as "expensive", "intrusive" and "unconstitutional".

(7) *"Empathy, this one is so important. I just would ask you to think. Put yourself in the shoes of another person. We're so quick to make judgments today in our country. Don't walk so fast"* [28]. The phraseological unit "to put oneself in someone else's shoes" means "to allow oneself to see or experience something from someone else's point of view" [25]. It provokes the addressee to ponder for a while, envisage the situation and the consequences, feel how one feels, suffers and struggles. It is quite important to note that in spite of this, the speaker doesn't let the potential audience get depressed and as it may seem, eventually, cheers it up by saying "Don't walk so fast". In fact, the whole figurativeness of the phraseological unit is destroyed because the speaker suggests putting on a pair of someone's shoes but not walking too fast in them. On the one hand, humorous effect enables the speaker to avoid tiresome talks and lectures. On the other hand, they convey the message to the electorate.

The second way of information compression is to attribute negative characteristics to what is being described.



(8) *“Next, we need to rein in the federal government’s out-of-control regulations that are like a wet blanket on the economy”* [29]. The phraseological unit “a wet blanket” is defined as “someone who spoils other people’s fun by being negative and complaining” [12], “dull or depressing person who spoils other people’s enjoyment” [25]. Negative connotations of this phraseological unit suffices to make the audience regard the current government’s bills as deterrent for the economy without going into details about the consequences of so called “out-of-control regulations”.

(9) *“But instead of answering those vital questions, President Obama came here yesterday and railed against arguments no one is making – and criticized policies no one is proposing. It’s one of his favorite strategies – setting up straw men to distract from his record”* [16]. The two-word phraseological unit “a straw man” is defined by different dictionaries as “a person or an idea that is weak and easy to defeat” [25] or “a weak or imaginary argument or opponent that is set up to be easily defeated” [13]. It is used to charge the president with evading the answers to the questions by means of creating some imaginary problems which are either easy to solve or no need to solve at all whereas acute problems are suppressed in order to ensure a good reputation.

(10) *“The Egyptian military has retaken control, but Clinton has opened the Pandora’s box of radical Islam. Then, there was the disastrous strategy of announcing our departure date from Iraq, handing large parts of the country over to ISIS killers”* [6]. According to the speaker, Hillary Clinton opened the Pandora’s box (a prolific source of troubles [13]). The latter implies the mistakes made by the politician which had horrible consequences. In spite of the fact, the phraseological unit highlights the considerable number of problems caused, it provides the speaker with the possibility to not specify anything. As a result, the speech takes less time. At the same time, the speaker manages to indicate that the opponent’s political career wasn’t irreproachable or flawless.

Alongside some negative associations, phraseological units also fulfill information compression by exploiting positive images created by the speaker.

(11) *“And the problem with our economy isn’t that the American people aren’t productive enough – you’re working harder than ever. Productivity is through the roof. It’s been going up consistently over the last decade. The challenge we face right now – the challenge we’ve faced for over a decade – is that harder work hasn’t led to higher incomes”* [17]. Willing to protect himself, the speaker shifts the blame for some economic problems on others. In fact, he hints that his opponent thinks these problems have something to do with the lack of hard work of the American people. Then he immediately rebuts it and claims that Americans do their best for the country. The phraseological unit «through the roof» highlights the greatness of what is being done: extremely high, enormous, steeply, at an extremely high level [13], to grow, intensify, or rise to an enormous, often unexpected degree [25], to rise or increase steeply [4]. Thus, “offensive words” of the opponent draw the addressees’ attention and help substitute the actual troubles for imaginary ones.

(12) *“Because the real pedigree that we need to help to heal this country, to revive this country: someone who believes in our constitution, and is willing to put it on the top shelf...”* [15]. Originally, we deal with the phraseological unit “top shelf”

which is defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary as “of the best quality” [13]. The speaker’s objective is to bring to light the burning desire to “make America great again” which has been the slogan for numerous campaigns in recent years. Verb with preposition “put on” makes it sound even more pathetic and stilted. It stems from the fact that “the top shelf” can be understood as the highest one in the row. It is known it is the case that the most precious books in the library are usually put on the top shelves so that they would not get damaged.

The final stage of the research is a quantitative analysis of phraseological units in the function of information compression categorized as following:

- 1) the coincidence between the visual image and the action;
- 2) negative associations’ appeal;
- 3) positive associations’ appeal.

The proportion of the categorized phraseological units is presented in Figure.

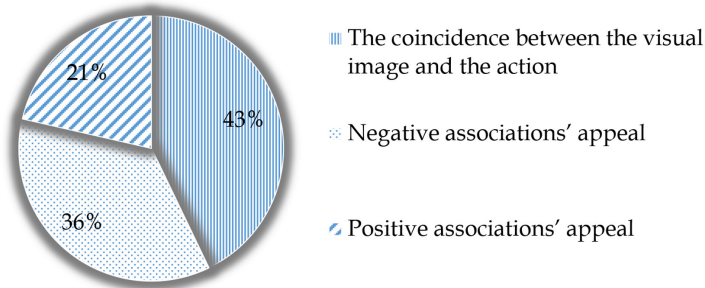


Fig. Quantitative proportion of the types of information compression

Conclusion

The research conducted in the paper demonstrates that some lack of factual information is apparently compensated by the inner potential of phraseological units acknowledged by their expressivity and picturesque. It also points out that informative value and reliability in the election discourse are not vital. The discourse effectiveness is of primary importance for the speaker. This effectiveness consists in the speaker’s ability to achieve the goals set for the election campaign. Since hardly any word we say is devoid of some connotation, it is bound to convey the speaker’s intentions with the view of exerting its influence on the potential addressee. It has also been proved that regulatory function of the language is rather indispensable than optional.

There are several types of information compression in the American election discourse by means of phraseological units. The prevailing number of these units can be acknowledged manipulative due to the visual coincidence with the described. It reveals the role of visualisation in humans’ life. Scientists claim that this type of information perception is the most wide-spread. A little less frequent are phraseological units creating a negative image for the listener. They enable the speaker to eliminate the details and sustain the idea of something bad, discreditable or repellent. Positive associations are least often. It can be concluded that such positive associations’ appeal is seen



as least efficient while manipulating the listener whereas negative associations' appeal and visual coincidence are more likely to have an impact on the electorate.

Although the corpus of examples analyzed is fairly limited due to the fact that there was only one presidential campaign taken into consideration, further research can be proceeded with a larger corpora to provide a more comprehensive analysis of information compression in the election discourse.

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**ФРАЗЕОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ЕДИНИЦЫ
КАК СРЕДСТВО ИНФОРМАЦИОННОГО СЖАТИЯ
В АМЕРИКАНСКОМ ПРЕДВЫБОРНОМ ДИСКУРСЕ**

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Фразеологические единицы являются одним из наиболее ярких примеров речевого манипулирования. Несмотря на то что роль фразеологии в управлении человеческим сознанием неоспорима, реакция индивидуума на фразеологическую единицу, значение и структура которой формировались столетиями, остается недостаточно изученной. В статье предпринята попытка классифицировать виды компрессии информации фразеологическими единицами на материале американского предвыборного дискурса. Фразеологические единицы распределены по типам на основе «впечатления», которое они производят на адресата. По итогам проведенного исследования выделено три типа компрессии информации и определено, какой тип компрессии информации при помощи фразеологических единиц является наиболее популярным при манипулировании. Результаты работы обнаруживают огромный потенциал фразеологизмов, представляющих собой средство компрессии информации, изменять поведение и взгляды адресата, а также внушать желаемое путем создания некой картинки в его воображении. Последнее указывает на существенную роль визуализации в восприятии человеком окружающего мира.

Ключевые слова: речевое манипулирование, предвыборный дискурс, компрессия информации, фразеологическая единица, визуализация

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