

УДК 811.111

DOI: 10.26140/bgз3-2021-1001-0079

ЛИНГВОКОГНИТИВНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ МАНИПУЛЯТИВНОГО ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОГО ДИСКУРСА

© Автор(ы) 2021

SPIN: 3368-8221

AuthorID: 1093596

ДЕВЯТНИКОВА Ксения Георгиевна, магистрант

Российский университет дружбы народов

(117198, Россия, Москва, ул. Миклухо-Маклая, 6, e-mail: kdeviatnikova@yandex.ru)

Аннотация. Цель данного исследования - определить ключевые критерии манипулятивного политического дискурса путем лингвокогнитивного анализа его манифестаций в статьях онлайн-газет. Автор рассматривает манипуляцию как скрытое, насильственное воздействие на адресата, имеющее как психологическую, так и лингвистическую природу. Для проведения анализа была сделана выборка примеров манипулятивного дискурса из популярных англоязычных интернет-газет: *The New York Times*, *The Independent*, *the CNBC*, *the European Security and Defense*, *the BBC*. Исследование проводилось на основе прагматического подхода и критического дискурс-анализа с использованием качественных и количественных методов обработки данных. Оценка манифестаций осуществлялась группой экспертов. В результате исследования были выделены следующие критерии манипулятивного дискурса: эффект подкрепления, двусмысленность, негативность, идентификация и эмоциональность. Также была рассчитана экспрессивность каждого критерия, определяющая прагматический аспект манипулятивных манифестаций с точки зрения их воздействия на адресата. Данное исследование предполагает введение в лингвистическую практику критериальной системы оценки манипулятивного дискурса и освещает научный потенциал и практические перспективы в этой области.

Ключевые слова: манипуляция, политический дискурс, медиадискурс, критерии манипуляции, прагматический подход, лингвокогнитивный анализ, оценка дискурса, подкрепление, двусмысленность, экспрессивность.

LINGUOCOGNITIVE ANALYSIS OF MANIPULATIVE POLITICAL DISCOURSE

© The Author(s) 2021

DEVIATNIKOVA Kseniia Georgievna, master student

Peoples' Friendship University of Russia

(117198, Russia, Moscow, ul. Mikluho-Maklaya, 6, e-mail: kdeviatnikova@yandex.ru)

Abstract. The aim of this chapter is to determine the predominant criteria of manipulative political discourse by linguocognitive analysis of their manifestations in online newspapers. The author considers manipulation as a phenomenon of hidden and forcible influence, with both psychological and linguistic nature. Examples are selected from the popular online newspapers: *The New York Times*, *The Independent*, *the CNBC*, *the European Security and Defense*, *the BBC*. The study of the manipulative political discourse is conducted referring to the pragmatic approach and the critical discourse analysis. The research includes both qualitative and quantitative methods of evaluation based on the data provided by the expert group. The following predominant criteria of manipulative message have been differentiated: reinforcement, ambiguity, negativity, identification, and emotionality. The defined expressiveness of each criteria shows pragmatic aspect of manipulative political discourse in regard of its effect on the recipient. This section is expected to introduce criteria system of manipulative discourse evaluation. It also suggests prospect of further development of this research field.

Keywords: manipulation, political discourse, media discourse, criteria of manipulation, pragmatic approach, linguocognitive analysis, discourse evaluation, reinforcement, ambiguity, expressiveness.

INTRODUCTION

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The manipulation phenomenon is nowadays under the spotlight of many researchers. Due to information saturation and its growing accessibility, the variety of language tools used to enhance the manipulative effect of a messages is expanding.

Ozyumenko [5] theorized that political discourse is characterized by more frequent use of manipulative techniques. With the increasing role of the press and other media resources, politics resort to the service of public relations specialists to present their message in the most favorable format and context. This approach helps them ensure public awareness and increase the likelihood of career advancement. Being formulated in proper words and word collocations the ideological message provides higher impact on people's conscious and emotions. So, the manipulation techniques of language are considered to be an influential tool. It is also necessary to take into account the psychological aspect of manipulative influence.

Sheinov [8] identified the following signs of manipulative influence: manipulation is aimed at controlling the addressee, characterized by hidden nature of its actions, and is used forcibly, contrary to the true will of the recipient. The mass media is used for manipulating public conscious, forming the opinion of the majority. One's life is limited to a relatively narrow circle of communication, so an assessment of country's political and social position is unlikely to be done objectively. That is why the media is used as a means

of forming public opinion.

According to recent research, the role of the media is to define the so-called "agenda setting".

Newman [4] has detected a direct relationship between the media presentation of events and the picture of the world formed in the minds of information consumers. Based on this fact, the main task of the media is not to broadcast thoughts and ideas, but to create a favorable ground in the people's minds for further reasoning. Thus, the mass media influences the public opinion to some extent mostly defining the issues for people's consideration. Respectfully selected topics and reports are passed through a kind of "language positioning". The ways and forms in which information is presented to the recipient affect indirectly their thoughts and intentions.

Painter [6] evaluated language functioning as shaping of beliefs, inseparable from their content and, moreover, as a means of their emotionalization. Since there are many ways to express the same thought, each time a distinctive ideological message could be embedded in it.

However, the increasing role of online platforms in the process of information dissemination has led to the prevalence of online newspapers and magazines over the print media. More and more newspapers are trying to maintain and develop personal websites, allowing them to optimize expenditures and provide readers with the most up-to-date news. A high rating of news sites gives the political discourse of online magazines a great ideological significance [2].

The aim of this chapter is to determine the predominant

criteria of manipulative political discourse by linguocognitive analysis of their manifestations in online newspapers.

The current discourse analysis methodology in a matter of manipulation interpretation is divided in two general approaches: critical analysis of T. van Dijk [10] and pragmatic approach of D. Maillat [3].

Since van Dijk's critical analysis focuses on the manipulator and his activity, the selection of manipulative manifestations will be conducted in accordance with this approach.

The second part of the study focused on the evaluation of manifestation's effects on the recipient will follow Maillat pragmatic approach. Maillat defined manipulation as a deliberate context in which the information is presented with several presuppositions.

The form of presentation in such a case is beneficial to the manipulator and perceived by the recipient with the rest of the context omitting.

Focusing on the very perception of information helps us stipulate the main criteria of manipulative political discourse and conduct linguocognitive analysis emphasizing on the addressee.

Fraser [1] examined the peculiarities of a discourse from the pragmatic point of view elaborating on the issue of some linguistic features of manipulative discourse. According to this research five distinct features of manipulative discourse could be differentiated. The results of research are presented in the table 1.

Table 1. Features of manipulative discourse by Fraser

Feature	Effect	Example
Attenuation	Mitigation of unwelcome effects on the recipient	He has an idea that you may find interesting.
Reinforcement	Amplifying the message effect on the recipient	I do insist that you sit down.
Vagueness	Accommodation of the recipient to a so-called "common ground"	It appears that we should go.
Negativity	The desire to suppress the will of the recipient providing the full freedom of actions	Take the boxes off the table, if you can manage it.
Positivity	The desire to ensure the will of the recipient coincides with the manipulator's one	Would you be so kind as to lift it up?

Given that the object of this chapter is the manifestations of manipulative political discourse and in accordance with the theoretical analysis of the thematic literature (including Fraser's research of the discourse features [1]), the criteria of pragmatic analysis of these phenomena were classified into the following categories (table 2).

Table 2. Criteria of manipulative discourse analysis

Abbreviation	Criteria category	Definition
AR	Attenuation / reinforcement	Mitigation or enhancement of the message effect on the recipient
LA	Literalism / ambiguity	Message utterance, the very word form of the manipulation message
NP	Negativity / positivity	Transmission of negative or positive attitude of the manipulator to the recipient or creation of such an attitude in the his/her mind
DI	Depersonalization / identification	Involvement or distraction from the message context of the manipulator as an actor
EN	Emotionality / neutrality	Presence or absence of evaluation component in the message

Here, it is necessary to provide the description of all the categories, represented by two opposite criteria each.

1. Attenuation/reinforcement (AR).

Accurate attenuation or reinforcement of speech could

guarantee success to a communicative act. Certain intention of the manipulator should be provided with special linguistic tools either to soften or to increase the effect on the recipient. Such an effect could be obtained by different means depending on the type of the manipulation.

Fraser [1] distinguished, on the one hand, propositional aspect of attenuation influencing the trustworthiness of a message. On the other hand, he described the reinforcement as the relationships between the propositional aspect of a message and the recipient's reaction. So, the main focus of attenuation is on the message content, while reinforcement is aimed at the transmission of desired attitude to recipient's mind. However, it should be noted that the exacerbated certainty of manipulator often leads to communication failure. It is likely to happen when there is some contradiction between the manipulator's and the recipient's framework of values.

Their mentality based on nationality, age, gender, educational and life background could force the propositional effect conceived by a manipulator together with the resulting effect in the recipient's conscious. The variety of language tools is used to manifest attenuation or reinforcement of a message. Some retrieved examples are presented below:

(1) "Just 100 days to mask — *not forever, just 100 days*" (The Times).

(2) "[...] we *pursue making certain* that only *legal votes* count in Wisconsin - and we *will immediately* do so" (the CNBC).

The example (1) shows the attenuation of a message connected with mask regime in USA, transmitted by split repetition. The example's (2) reinforcement is created by the combination of language tools: epithet, modalization, lexis choosing.

2. Literalism/ambiguity (LA).

Manipulation in a speech act is based on a number of language means, including colored lexis, various rhetorical statements, metaphors, comparisons, euphemism, modalization, etc.

Ponton [7] theorized that analyzing a discourse we should not fix our attention on individual forms of manipulation. Indeed, the majority of manipulations is considered to be carried out through figurative lexis, although sometimes a certain degree of literalism could be observed. In the following example (3) the word «harshly» is more literal than the metaphoric expression «brain death»:

(3) "President Macron has *harshly* criticized NATO, defining it in "*brain death*" in an interview given in November" (the ESD).

3. Negativity/positivity (NP).

Ozyumenko [5] evaluated aggressive component of manipulated speech acts and argued upon the increasing negative propositioning of persuasive political discourse. Negative message deliberately misleads the audience and somehow suggest a certain idea to subordinate it ideologically. Such a type of manipulation is implemented to intimidate, embarrass the audience, or otherwise to increase their emotional response. Positive manipulation is aimed at recipient's emotional lifting, sometimes rather inspiring and motivating. The question of more influential aspect, whether it is negativity or positivity of the message, is seemed debatable. In the following examples, sample (4) could be characterized by negativity, while (5) is more positive one.

(4) "Chuck Schumer *marveled* [...]: "Honestly, *the hypocrisy is astounding*." (The Times)

(5) "*We owe it* to the French; *we owe it* to our fishermen and to other economic sectors." (The Independent)

4. Depersonalization/identification (DI).

This pair of criteria indicates the presence or absence of the main actor of the context. In case of manipulation, the role of the participant can be emphasized, minimized, or completely omitted. The process of omitting or minimizing the role performed by the participant could be called depersonalization. This effect may be obtained by transitivity and passivization. On the contrary, identification

as a criterion is manifested through complete or partial involvement of the actor in the context. For enhancement of this involvement the modalization is quiet frequently used as a means. Some language tools have been already observed in our previous chapter. Here, it is necessary to clarify the peculiarities of this criteria category. An interesting example of how the information may be presented to the reader is the samples (6) and (7). These sentences actually belong to one passage of the article from The Independent, and shows the way of transmitting a message favorable to the manipulator.

(6) *“The EU is ready to reach an agreement with Great Britain, but not at any price.”*

(7) *“Everyone has their principles, it’s clear that there are red lines, yet there is always room for compromise [...]”* (German spokesman to The Independent)

It could be seen how the manipulator (as a spokesman on behalf of the country) identifies the country with a certain policy (6). Coming to excuse for not meeting the expectations of the audience, he depersonalizes, and even generalizes (7).

5. Emotionality/neutrality (EN).

This category of criteria is difficult to assess, since most manipulative manifestations are colored emotionally. Some of them though may be considered as more emotional than others. The evaluation of emotionality expressiveness is subjective but helps get better picture on the part of the recipient. The following examples (8), (9) are both emotionally colored, although a great difference of the utterance and mostly of the effect on the recipient could be noted:

(8) *“The faster we get 75 percent of this country vaccinated, the faster we end COVID-19 and the sooner everything returns to normal”* (the CNBC)

(9) *“I feel incredibly proud that my majority has increased [...] it demonstrates that Brighton Pavilion continues to believe in compassion, justice and a bigger future.”* (The BBC)

Regardless the established division into criteria categories, all five classes of characteristics can be observed in a specific manifestation of manipulative political discourse. Thus, the following methodology of research is considered appropriate to determine the prevailing criteria.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology comprises methods of qualitative and quantitative analysis of manipulative political discourse manifestations. On the first stage, the articles of political discourse were selected from the popular online newspapers writing politics: The New York Times, The Independent, the CNBC, the European Security and Defense, the BBC. Next, the articles were analyzed with the application of van Dijk’s critical discourse analysis. Several samples of different manipulation manifestations were collected to the following assessment. Due to the qualitative methods implementation, the number of samples chosen was shortened to 100 examples.

On the second stage, the pragmatic approach of Maillat was used to evaluate the effect of manipulative political discourse according to the defined criteria. 20 Russian respondents speaking English at C1 level (certified in a correspondence with the CEFR guideline) were proposed to assess selected samples according to these criteria. For quantitative interpretation of the results the following rating scale was arranged (table 3).

Table 3. Rating table of manipulative political discourse assessment

Criterion	Rating					Anti-criterion
Attenuation	1	2	3	4	5	Reinforcement
Literalism	1	2	3	4	5	Ambiguity
Negativity	1	2	3	4	5	Positivity
Depersonalization	1	2	3	4	5	Identification
Emotionality	1	2	3	4	5	Neutrality

The rating table includes standard scales consisting of pairs of opposite characteristics and points from 1 to 5. Extreme points mean a strong presence of one of the characteristics, the rest is intermediate, depending on the degree of a

particular criterion manifestation. The respondents evaluated each sample of manifestation according to their subjective perception.

On the third stage the quantitative methods of data processing were applied to define the predominant criterion in each pair. The following statistical calculations were organized:

1) Calculating of the central tendency in terms of each criteria category for a particular sample, namely AR, LA, NP, DI, NE:

$$\bar{x}_{yz} = \frac{x_{y1} + x_{y2} + \dots + x_{yN}}{N}, \quad (1)$$

where \bar{x}_{yz} is the central tendency of each criteria category

variation row,

x_{yN} – is the particular meaning of manipulative political

discourse manifestation according to the criteria category, y – one of the criteria categories (AR, LA, NP, DI, NE), N – is the number of samples collected in one variation row,

z – is the serial number of a sample.

2) Calculating the coefficient of expressiveness for each criteria category

$$\bar{k}_y = \frac{x_{y1} + x_{y2} + \dots + x_{yn}}{n}, \quad (2)$$

where \bar{k}_y is the central tendency of the variation row of

each criteria category’s means,

y – one of the criteria categories (AR, LA, NP, DI, NE),

\bar{x}_{yn} – is the mean of each criteria category manifestation

for a particular sample,

n – is the number of means collected in the variation row of samples.

On the fourth stage of the research all the data gathered were put under the linguistic analysis. The predominant criterion for each category was defined. The manipulation manifestations of online newspapers political discourse were characterized according to the conducted research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of theoretical research in the sphere of manipulative political discourse, five pairs of criteria were identified. The samples chosen were evaluated according to the methodology stated in this chapter. The whole variation of manipulative discourse manifestations contained 100 examples taken from the political online newspapers. The samples have been assessed by 20 experts in accordance with the manifestation of 5 criteria category to the extent from 1 to 5. Then central tendencies were collected, and the coefficient of expressiveness for each category was calculated. The results are presented in the table 4.

Table 4. Coefficient of expressiveness for each criteria category

Coefficient	\bar{k}_{AR}	\bar{k}_{LA}	\bar{k}_{NP}	\bar{k}_{DI}	\bar{k}_{EN}
Meaning	3,86	3,96	2,52	3,56	2,02

The obtained coefficients signify the inclination of the manipulation manifestation to the certain extreme criterion of the category. All the results are close to the mean, although the tendency of each category can be differentiated.

1. Attenuation/reinforcement (AR).

$$\bar{k}_{AR} = 3,86$$

The identified tendency is towards the reinforcement. The manipulative message may be therefore characterized by strong connection between the propositional aspect and the recipient’s reaction. Propositioning of any message is actualized in accordance with the expectations experienced by the manipulator. Expressed by metaphors, the reinforcing

criterion received a higher point. The following sample (10) got one the highest means $\bar{x}_{AR10} = 4,86$ due to the presence of

low lexis and metaphorical expression “*stoke anger and fear*”.

(10) “They are *stoking anger and fear* among his supporters. And *hell*, I voted for him.” (The Independent)

The respondents evaluated this sentence as quite a persuasive one, since it makes the statement trustworthy creating a sense of “personal attitude” presence. Thus, the false association with the speaker is established, enhancing the persuasiveness of the message.

2. Literalism/ambiguity (LA).

$$\bar{x}_{LA} = 3,96$$

The identified tendency is towards the ambiguity. The result of this category analysis was predictable due to various linguistic means used in manipulative discourse. For instance, The Independent criticizing the election campaign of D. Trump (11) resorted to a vague metaphor “*a game of whack-a-mole*” with a calculated mean $\bar{x}_{LA11} = 4,2$.

Meanwhile, some literal manipulation manifestations were presented in the sample row as well. Their expressiveness is achieved mostly by modalization (12), (13).

(11) “[...] it’s a *game of whack-a-mole* [...]”

(12) “[...] we *need* the U.S. back to accelerate a movement that has started already.” (The Independent)

(13) “And we *should not lose* sight of the larger picture [...]” (The Times)

According to the respondents’ feedback the literal word construction transmits the message of the speaker-manipulator almost immediately. On the other hand, the ambiguity of the meaning creates extra-linguistic connection with an object from everyday life, enriching the very meaning of the phrase, making it more significant to the recipient.

3. Negativity/positivity (NP).

$$\bar{x}_{NP} = 2,52$$

The identified tendency is towards the negativity. Although the positive reinforcement is considered by many scientists as more persuasive one, the results of this research show the reverse tendency. A great number of manipulation manifestations in political discourse can be taken from debates and disputes between the representatives of conflicting political parties. The purpose of political debates is to suppress the opponent, to impose one’s own point of view. Thus, negativity and even aggression have become a hallmark of the political discourse.

(14) “[...] Perdue [...] declined to debate because he didn’t want to “*incriminate himself*” over his personal financial activities that the challenger summed up as “*cartoonish abuse of power*.” (The Times)

The manipulator resorted to inverted commas to highlight the main part of the phrase increasing the effect on the recipient. The metaphorical trait of the word combination “*cartoonish abuse of power*” was rated by respondents as exacerbating.

4. Depersonalization/identification (DI).

$$\bar{x}_{DI} \bar{x}_{DI} = 3,56$$

As far as this category is concerned, the manipulation manifestations tend towards the identification. Manipulators often resort to accusations in political discourse, thus a clear identification of the opponent is seemed necessary, as it is shown in samples (15), (16).

Seeking the greater effect of engagement in the context some political leaders deliver speeches on behalf of their own (personalization) or generalize (identification with the audience). The latter case is frequently manifested in the use of the personal pronoun “we” (15). Though, it may be unclear who this generalization refers to. Meanwhile, the depersonalization criterion is also used in manipulation manifestation. The respondent group estimate such a sample as vague and uncertain (17).

(15) “*My concern* from the beginning is to make it really clear to *China* [...] that *if you want to play by, then we’ll play with you*” (J. Biden for the CNBC)

(16) “It shows *an astonishing arrogance* and *sense of entitlement* for *Georgia’s senior U.S. senator* to believe *he* shouldn’t have to debate at a moment like this in our history [...]” (The Independent)

(17) “*Someone* is going to get hurt, *someone* is going to get shot, *someone* is going to get killed [...]” (The Times)

5. Emotionality/neutrality (EN).

$$\bar{x}_{EN} = 2,02$$

Although the analysis of this category has shown a clear tendency towards the emotionality, the calculated expressiveness of this criteria is above 2 points. So, the emotional aspect of manipulative manifestations is not always excessive. The sample (18) which central tendency is $\bar{x}_{EN18} = 1,16$

is an example of highly persuasive emotionality, expressed by metaphorical phrasal verb and metaphor itself.

(18) “[...] China itself tends to *look down* on Russia and this exposes Russian dependency on China, its *so-called benevolent benefactor*”. (The ESD)

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter the author conducts linguocognitive analysis of manipulative manifestations in political discourse of online newspapers.

The analysis is carried out in accordance with the identified criteria categories. Implementing the methods of linguocognitive analysis the author differentiates the predominant criteria of manipulative political discourse, namely reinforcement of the message effect on the recipient, ambiguity of the message utterance, manipulator’s negative propositioning and identification with the context, and emotionality of the speech act.

The manipulation manifestations are evaluated by the group of respondents; thus, the result of the research shows the pragmatic aspect of manipulative political discourse.

Further research in this field may be aimed at the control corpus expansion for the validation of the identified criteria, and application of these criteria to assessment of manipulative acts in other discourses or languages. Moreover, due to the growing frequency of the manipulation phenomenon the list of criteria may be expanded.

Political discourse of online newspapers and the whole mass media culture is getting more and more invaded with manipulative messages. Increasing competition challenges all sources of information, forcing them to invent new means of influencing the recipient.

It is the manipulation that is used to provide deliberate context in such a way as to actualize the information in the reader’s conscious. So, understanding the characteristic features of manipulative discourse is necessary to ensure awareness and security of media users.

REFERENCES:

1. Fraser, B. (2015). *The combining of Discourse Markers. A beginning*. Journal of Pragmatics. DOI: 10.1016/j.pragma.2015.06.007
2. Jacobson, S., Marino, J., Gutsche, R. (2016). *The Digital Animation of Literary Journalism*. Journalism, 17(4), 527–546. DOI: 10.1177/1464884914568079
3. Maillat, D., Oswald, S. (2009). *Defining Manipulative Discourse: The Pragmatics of Cognitive Illusions*. International Review of Pragmatics 1, 348–370. DOI: 10.1163/187730909X12535267111651
4. Newman, L. S. (2009). *Was Walter Lippmann interested in stereotyping?: Public opinion and cognitive social psychology*. History of Psychology, 12(1), 7–18. DOI: 10.1037/a0015230
5. Ozyumenko, V. (2017). *Media Discourse in an Atmosphere of Information Warfare: From Manipulation to Aggression*. Russian Journal of Linguistics, 21 (1), 203–220. DOI: 10.22363/2312-9182-2017-21-1-203-220
6. Painter, D. (2008). *Language and politics*. Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, 26 (2), 295–296. DOI: 10.2989/SALALS.2008.26.2.9.573
7. Ponton D., Larina T. (2016). *Discourse Analysis in the 21st Century: Theory and Practice (I)*. Russian Journal of Linguistics, 20 (4), 7–25. DOI: 10.22363/2312-9182-2016-20-4-7-25
8. Sheinov, V.P. (2017). *Vulnerability to Manipulation and its Relation to Cognitive and Personality Features in Adolescents*. RUDN Journal of

Psychology and Pedagogics, 14 (2), 167—177. DOI 10.22363/2313-1683-2017-14-2-167-177

9. Sympson, P., Mayr, A., Statham, S. (2018). *Analysing Political Discourse. Language and Power. Language and Linguistics Compass* 6(11), 160-163. DOI: 10.4324/9780429468896-34

10. Van Dijk, Teun. (2006). *Discourse and manipulation. Discourse and Society* 17(3), 359-383. DOI: 10.1177/0957926506060250

Статья поступила в редакцию 29.11.2020

Статья принята к публикации 27.02.2021