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**PRECEDENT HISTORIC NAMES IN RUSSIAN POLITICAL  
ADVERTISING VIDEOTEXTS**

Anastasia Dmitrieva (a)\*, Marina Golomidova (b)

\*Corresponding author

(a) Ural Federal University, Ekaterinburg, Russia, 19 Mira Street, 620002, a.v.dmitrieva@urfu.ru

(b) (Ural Federal University, Ekaterinburg, Russia, 19 Mira Street, 620002, golomidova-marin@mail.ru

***Abstract***

Precedent proper names, well-known within a certain social group and endowed with sociocultural worthiness, represent a unique tool of meaning making and linguistic manipulation. In the texts of political discourse, a particular significance is attributed to precedent names associatively connected with historic realia. The paper is devoted to the analysis of the role and linguosemiotic particularities of precedent proper names from the “History” sphere of concepts in Russian political advertising videotexts. The authors envisage political advertising video clips issued during the presidential campaigns in Russia in the last 30 years. The research results demonstrate that precedent names related to historical microtopics and personalities fall into three basic semantic groups: 1) names of historic figures, 2) names of historical periods and events, 3) names of historic realia. In the framework of the first two categories, we can distinguish some subgroups depending on historical periods: 1) pre-Soviet time, 2) Soviet epoch, 3) post-Soviet period. It was discovered that the most numerous group of precedent names is constituted by the names of historic figures, and the most frequently used names among them are those of Soviet personalities. Precedent proper names actively interact with nonverbal precedent signs, and the techniques of verbalization of general precedent semantics can vary. The comprehensive use of precedent proper names and nonverbal precedent signs, connected to them, simplifies the information perception considerably while affecting the voters’ feelings and emotions and, thus, producing a greater impact on them.

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**Keywords:** Precedent proper name, political advertising, videotext, sphere of concepts, multimodal text.



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## 1. Introduction

The creators of political advertising texts aspire to influence the minds of the electorate with the help of multiple semiotic instruments and diverse technologies of their use. One widespread technique of demonstrating political stances, views, and “promises” of candidates for presidency consists in making reference to historic realia. Understanding historical processes and highlighting key meaning-based points in political interpretation of historical development play a pivotal role in creating a vision of the future aimed at the collective consciousness. Therefore, the very selection of historical facts and their presentation in a certain light allow to set common worldview grounds for a politician and the voters.

An interesting sign material taking part in the realization of historical microtopics in political advertising texts includes precedent proper names (hereinafter referred to as PPNs). In the Russian linguistics, PPNs, and more broadly – precedent signs – are understood as “well-known (within a certain group of people)” and “having a value-based significance” names / cultural signs Zakharenko, Gudkov, Krasnykh, and Bagayeva, (1997), Slyshkin (2000) and Nakhimova (2007). PPNs have a considerable number of background connotations and are able to evoke in the memory of speech community members a whole set of knowledge, beliefs, figurative and attitudinal semantics associated with the corresponding denotations. PPNs often become part of various expressive means (metaphors, metonymies, comparisons, symbols, allusions etc.) for conveying the meaning of a speech message in a more precise or, on the contrary, implicit way. Due to the mentioned properties of precedent signs, the creators of manipulative texts (including political ones) actively use them to enhance cognitive and attractive effects as well as to wield a stronger influence on the minds of the target audience.

## 2. Problem Statement

Precedent names as a research object have been regularly discussed by Russian linguists in the recent years. PPNs have been studied in the framework of various spheres of concepts (see Bogdanovich, Nakhimova, & Segal, 2019; Dulebova & Kryukova, 2017; Turkova-Sarayskaya, 2019, etc.) and in texts of different genres: political discourse (Petrenko & Slepakova, 2016; Pirozhkova, 2017), mass communication (Glinka, 2019; Nakhimova, 2007), literary texts (Guseva, 2018; Petrov, 2018) etc. However, the research interest is mostly focused on verbal material. Meanwhile, the particularities of integrating PPNs into complex multimodal texts created with the help of verbal and nonverbal signs still remain understudied. We could only mention several steps made in this direction (Babikova, 2016; Stepanova, 2013). Unveiling the special traits of the PPNs’ role in communicating the topical content of multimodal political advertising texts represents a wide field for scholarly studies.

Verbal and nonverbal components in political (as well as any other) texts are part of some meaning areas – spheres of concepts, – formed around particular concepts (items in a person’s mind which comprise and combine cultural, attitudinal, linguistic and mental dimensions). In other words, concepts are formed in a person’s consciousness, based on the values of the culture in which he/she is immersed and then find expression in the language (Slyshkin, 2000). Our research attention is devoted to the PPNs and corresponding nonverbal precedent signs in the “History” sphere of concepts.

### 3. Research Questions

The studied material encompasses around 100 texts of Russian political advertising video clips issued the scope of presidential campaigns in the last 30 years. This rather lengthy period of time, in which the analyzed material was created, allows not only to clarify the general tendencies but also to estimate some dynamics in its realization.

### 4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of our research is to define the role, linguocultural and linguosemiotic particularities of using precedent proper names in Russian political advertising videotexts. In this sense, the key objectives of the study are the following:

- revealing main semantic groups of PPNs in the framework of the “History” sphere of concepts;
- considering the specificity of interaction of verbal and nonverbal signs in terms of foregrounding general denotation and conveying topical text meanings;
- comparative analysis of particularities in the use of PPNs in the videotexts of various presidential campaigns from 1990s to the present time.

### 5. Research Methods

In line with the above listed objectives, the main research methods include:

- conceptual and lexico-semantic analysis, which allows to regard the PPNs in the studied videotexts from the semantic point of view and to reveal main semantic groups;
- intertextual and semiotic approaches, which help to study the interaction of “construction” elements of varied sign nature in multimodal texts;
- discursive approach, combined with some methods of component and comparative analyses, allows to envisage the particularities of using PPNs from the “History” sphere of concepts in political advertising videotexts from different presidential campaigns (1991 – 2018).

### 6. Findings

All precedent proper names in the framework of the “History” sphere of concepts in the studied videotexts can be organized into three semantic groups: 1) names of historic personalities, 2) names of historic realia, 3) names of historical periods and events.

#### 6.1. Precedent names of historic personalities

Names of famous people of the past constitute the largest group of PPNs in the studied political videotexts. These names, in turn, can be divided into three subgroups depending on the historical period: 1) names of the pre-Soviet time; 2) names of the Soviet epoch; 3) names of the post-Soviet period.

Famous people’s names of the pre-Soviet period mostly refer to the personalities (especially politicians) from the Russian history. For instance, the PPN *Stolypin* is used by V. Zhirinovskiy and B. Titov, inspired by the reforms undertaken by the Russian minister of internal affairs P. Stolypin in the

early XX century, to advocate for the similar reforms of the countryside. Another name – *Saint Prince Vladimir*, who initiated the Christianization of Ancient Rus’ – is mentioned as part of a weighty argument for the annexation of Crimea in one of V. Putin’s video clips: *Saint Prince Vladimir* received baptism in Chersonese, situated in Crimea (AgitProp RF, 2018d).

A whole range of precedent signs in the form of portraits, photos and video images appear in one of G. Yavlinsky’s videos to demonstrate the dynamics of progressive social and political views in Russia. Among the historic figures, there are various Moscow princes, Russian tsars and emperors (e.g. *Alexander Nevsky*, *Ivan the Terrible*, *Peter I*, *Catherine II*, *Alexander II* etc.), political and public personalities (*M. Speransky* (reformer of the early XIX century), some *Decembrists*), scientists (*M. Lomonosov*, *I. Pavlov*) and writers (*L. Tolstoy*, *A. Pushkin*, *A. Chekhov*, *I. Turgenev* etc.). All these images actualize the corresponding PPNs in the minds of the audience. Though some of the mentioned people mostly expressed themselves in the spheres of culture and science, all of them are viewed in the context of historical development. This range also includes some famous figures of the XX century (*S. Korolev*, *Yu. Gagarin*, *Yu. Lotman*, *A. Sakharov*, *M. Bulgakov*, *K. Stanislavsky*, *S. Dyagilev*, *V. Vysotsky*, *A. Solzhenitsyn* etc.) and finishes with the writing: *ЯВЛИНСКИЙ / 2018 (YAVLINSKY / 2018)* (AgitProp RF, 2018a). Thus, the name of the candidate is also put into this cultural and historical context.

The only exclusion from the scope of Russian historical onomastic signs is the PPN *Alexander the Great* (of Macedonia). It is mentioned in one of A. Lebed’s video clips, aimed at appealing to some great commanders of the past with the name Alexander (also that of the candidate, a former military man). Alongside the name *Alexander the Great*, the videotext contains the PPNs *Alexander Nevsky* and *Alexander Suvorov* as examples of great military leaders able to show to “give people hope” (Politota, 2009). Therefore, the “last link” in this chain is the candidate himself.

The names of famous people of the Soviet period are also quite numerous and include, in the first place, those of famous political (and sometimes military) leaders with socialist and communist ideas: *V. Lenin*, *I. Stalin*, *N. Khrushchev*, *L. Brezhnev*, *V. Chapayev*, *K. Marx*, *F. Engels*, *Hugo Chavez*, *Che Guevara*, *Fidel Castro*. Logically, the majority of these names appear in communist video clips and are actualized with the help of nonverbal precedent signs: sculptures, portraits and video images of the corresponding historic figures (AgitProp RF, 2017a; AgitProp RF, 2018c; Telekanal Soyuz, 2018). Sometimes, videotexts contain combinations of images, citations and allusions. For instance, in one of P. Grudinin’s videotexts, we hear a famous Lenin’s phrase: *Учиться, учиться и еще раз учиться... / Study, study and again study*, - repeated in writing on a Soviet-time poster with the signature “*Lenin*” and a portrait of this Bolshevik leader on the screen (AgitProp RF, 2018c).

On the other hand, some of the above-mentioned names are found in videoclips of candidates representing other parties and political forces. For example, V. Zhirinovskiy, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, has been using such names in his videos since the 1990s, usually in order to intimidate or scare the audience: *Все, что сделал Ленин, Сталин, Хрущев, Брежнев... и демократы, - это была большая политическая ошибка, унесшая миллионы жизней и подорвавшая нашу экономику и культуру / Everything done by Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev... and the democrats was a big political mistake that claimed the lives of millions of people and shattered our economy and culture.* (Alexander Luchenok, 2018). In such cases PPNs of Soviet leaders mostly appear in the verbal form.

As for the names of the post-Soviet time, we should be selective because this period borders on the present. Thus, in the video clips of the 1990s, the names of politicians of that time should logically be put into “The Present” category. However, the same names transfer to the “History” concept sphere when used in video clips of subsequent presidential campaigns. This is true for the PPNs *Gorbachev, Chubais, Gaidar, Burbulis, Yeltsin*, which are usually present in the form of images triggering associations with the corresponding people in the viewers’ consciousness. For instance, A. Bogdanov in one of his video clips in 2008 speaks of “*the democrats of the first flow, the reformers of the 90s*” who “*have been repeatedly dropping the banner of democratic freedoms into the mud in the recent years*” (AgitProp RF, 2018b).

Simultaneously, the audience observes the images of some Russian reformers of the 90-s: *E. Gaidar, G. Burbulis, A. Chubais*, – so that it becomes clear which “democrats” are spoken of.

When comparing PPNs of historic figures in videotexts of different presidential campaigns, the following tendencies are discovered. The PPNs of the Soviet time are represented most frequently, while the largest number of mentions (including nonverbal precedent signs associated with particular PPNs) is observed in the 2018 video clips (see Table 01). However, almost half of them correspond to one of G. Yavlinsky’s videotexts entirely consisting of nonverbal signs. The rest of PPNs of famous Soviet figures mostly appear in the videotexts of communist candidates, which is quite predictable. Besides, among all those names, the most frequently used ones are those of *Lenin* and *Stalin*.

**Table 01.** Use of PPNs of historic figures in Russian presidential video clips (1991 – 2018)

	1990s video clips	2000-2008 video clips	2012-2018 video clips	All PPNs in 1991 – 2018 video clips
PPNs of people of the pre-Soviet time	3	-	38	41
PPNs of people of the Soviet time	6	3	62	71
PPNs of people of the post-Soviet time	1	3	8	21
All PPNs of historic figures	19	6	108	133

PPNs of the pre-Soviet period are encountered in the studied videotexts much more rarely. A considerable part of them (see Table 01), accrue to the 2018 videotexts (mostly to the same video clip of G. Yavlinsky). The other pre-Soviet names are present only to a slight degree. Generally, the use of these PPNs in political videotexts reflects the candidates’ will to associate themselves with great politicians, reformers and military commanders of the past to gain the respect and sympathy of the audience.

Famous names of the post-Soviet time are even less represented in the studied videotexts. Most of them are encountered in the political cartoon of B. Yeltsin, where the initiators of the August Putsch, the Soviet coup d’etat attempt in 1991, – *G. Yanayev, V. Kryuchkov, B. Pugo, V. Pavlov* etc. – are shown in a caricatural way (AgitProp RF, 2017b). The Putsch had happened not long before the election campaign of 1996 and seared into people’s memory, which determined the use of these names in the video clip. PPNs *Gaidar* and *Chubais*, economists-reformers of the early 1990s, are encountered several times (in video clips of V. Zhirinovsky (1996) and A. Bogdanov (2008)). The other precedent names (and nonverbal signs) of post-Soviet period (*Gorbachev, Yeltsin, Obama, G. Bush Junior, B. Nemtsov*) are observed once or twice on average in the videotexts of the 2018 presidential campaign. In general, PPNs of the post-Soviet period are associated with either political and economic earthquakes of the early 1990s or the

complicated external policy of Russia. These particularities of the precedent material are quite logical and understandable: by reminding the voters of the recent problems, the video clip creators warn them about the possible repetition in case of voting for the “wrong” candidate.

## 6.2. Names of historical periods and events

Most names of historical periods and events in Russian political video clips refer to the Soviet time (*the Great October Socialist Revolution, the Civil War of 1918-1921, the Great Patriotic War* (Russian term for designating the World War II), *the 1980 Olympic Games, Zastoi*), several names – to the pre-Soviet period (*the Time of Trouble*) and the 1990s (*the August Putsch*).

Only few PPNs of this semantic group are present in the verbal form in the studied videotexts: «НЕ ДОПУСТИ КРАСНОЙ СМУТЫ» / “KEEP THE RED TIME OF TROUBLE AT BAY” (Politreklama, 2012a); “*the Time of Trouble is continuing*” (Politota, 2012). This name (*the Time of Trouble*), initially given to the period of dynastic crisis in Russia in the early XVII century, is often used as a PPN to characterize periods of political instability in our country.

A lot of precedent names of historical periods and events are actualized with the help of allusion or indirectness coupled with appropriate video images: *Никто в России в 1917 году не думал, что брат пойдет на брата, а отец на сына* / *In 1917 nobody in Russia knew that a brother would turn his arms against a brother and a father – against a son* (reference to *the Civil War of 1918-1921*) (Politreklama, 2012a); *Сорок первый грозный год не забыл еще народ* / *People haven't forgotten the dreadful year of 1941 yet* (reference to the beginning of *the Great Patriotic War*) (Telekanal Soyuz, 2018).

Some names of periods and events are actualized by introducing ideographic nonverbal signs into videotexts: an image of the Olympic bear flying to the sky – an allusion to *the 1980 Olympic Games* in the USSR (Politreklama, 2012b); the shot from the “Aurora” cruiser in 1917 – the beginning of *the Great October Socialist Revolution*; the House of the Soviets in Moscow under fire – *the August Putsch* in 1991 (AgitProp RF, 2017a) etc.

Overall, the studied videotexts most often include references to PPNs of historical periods and events of the Soviet time. In this respect, *the Great Patriotic War* and *the Civil War* are especially prominent ones. The name of *the August Putsch*, referring to the post-Soviet period, is also quite common. The PPNs of pre-Soviet events and periods are only represented by the few cases of mentioning *the Time of Trouble* (in different variations) in the video clips of 1996 and 2012.

From the perspective of different presidential campaigns, it is noticeable that videotexts of 1996 most frequently include such PPNs as *the August Putsch* and *the Civil War*. Both cases are absolutely typical: the memories of August 1991 were still fresh while the Civil War was recalled due to the political crises of 1991 and 1993. As for the video clips of the early 2000s, PPNs of both Soviet and post-Soviet periods were used almost equally as often. In the former case, the encountered PPNs are *the Great October Socialist Revolution* and *the Great Patriotic War*. In the latter case, *the August Putsch* is mentioned again, usually in the form of pictures of the House of the Soviets in Moscow under shellfire.

The largest amount of mentions of different historical periods and events is observed in the video clips issued in 2018 (see Table 02). Most commonly, these videotexts contain nonverbal precedent signs evoking the associations with *the Great Patriotic War*, which are encountered in video clips of candidates

from different political parties. This event serves as a symbol of social cohesion and heroic past of the Russian people. Perhaps, it is one of just few historic events still evoking powerful patriotic feelings in the voters' hearts. Hence, reference to this PPN should have an emotive and psychological effect on the target audience, which explains the frequent use of precedent signs connected with this name.

**Table 02.** Use of PPNs of historical periods and events in Russian presidential video clips (1991 – 2018)

	1990s video clips	2000-2008 video clips	2012-2018 video clips	All PPNs in 1991 – 2018 video clips
PPNs of periods and events of the pre-Soviet time	1	-	1	2
PPNs of periods and events of the Soviet time	3	2	8	13
PPNs of periods and events of the Soviet time	2	2	2	6
All PPNs of historical periods and events	6	4	11	21

### 6.3. Precedent names of historic realia

PPNs of historic realia constitute the smallest semantic group within the studied sphere of concepts. It comprises just two names: the “*Aurora*” cruiser and the “*Soyuz*” carrier rocket (and spacecraft), mainly actualized in the studied videotexts with the help of images. The “*Aurora*” cruiser, famous for the historic shot to signalize the assault of the Winter Palace starting the October Revolution in 1917, appeared in the video clips of communist candidates G. Zyuganov (AgitProp RF, 2017a) and M. Suraykin (Telekanal Soyuz, 2018, March 16). In both cases, this precedent sign is put in the context of the communist history told in the form of a song complemented by multiple video fragments. The image of the “*Aurora*” cruiser evokes the corresponding PPN in the consciousness of the audience.

Multimodal precedent signs associated with the PPN “*Soyuz*” are usually observed in the studied videotexts as images of a rocket launch. However, in one case, this name is written on the corresponding spacecraft exhibited in the Aeronautics and Space Museum (AgitProp RF, 2018). In general, the PPN “*Soyuz*” is associated in the minds of most Russian people with scientific progress and space exploration, causing the feeling of national pride. Hence, the frequent use of this precedent sign by various candidates (G. Zyuganov – in 2008, D. Medvedev – in 2012, M. Suraykin – in 2018) is not surprising.

Thus, the use of precedent signs related to the names of historic realia in the Russian political advertising videotexts is quite insignificant. The only prominent feature in this group of names is the PPN “*Soyuz*” which makes the audience feel proud of the scientific and technical development of our country.

## 7. Conclusion

Precedent names belonging to the “History” sphere of concepts and nonverbal precedent signs associated with them are well represented in the texts of Russian political advertising video clips of the late XX – early XXI century. A vast group of precedent onomastic signs is constituted by the names of historic figures. PPNs of historical periods and events are represented to a lesser extent while the names of historic realia are almost insignificant in number.

It was discovered that the most frequently used PPNs refer to the Soviet times. On the one hand, it is communist candidates' videos that are abound in verbal allusions and visual signs related to the names of Soviet leaders and heroic events of that time. On the other hand, candidates representing other political parties also advert to PPNs of the Soviet period. Firstly, this can be explained by the same appeal to the heroic past of our country (as in the case of *the Great Patriotic War*) or the candidates' will to show their program as part of an indissoluble chain of great events and advances contributing to the development of Russia (as in G. Yavlinsky's video clip). Secondly, some examples of PPNs of Soviet leaders characterize candidates' aspiration to discredit these actors of the past and emphasize the advantages of their own program (as in the case of the PPNs *Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev* in V. Zhirinovskiy's video clip).

PPNs of the "History" sphere of concepts are of utmost importance for conveying crucial political meanings. They allow to refer (in a laconic form) to generalized and simplified knowledge of historical processes, figures, periods etc. and, thus, activate the attitudes of target audiences to social dynamics and social and economic development benchmarks which are important for the voters of each candidate.

Techniques of actualizing the content directly communicated by precedent names can vary. In some cases, we can observe the dominant role of PPNs in connecting and integrating the relevant nonverbal surrounding when introducing a historical microtopic in an advertising videotext. In other cases, a PPN can easily be reconstructed by virtue of figurative means (e.g. "the year 1917" means *the Great October Socialist Revolution*). Another technique – the indirect actualization of a PPN – is the use of ideographic nonverbal signs closely related in the collective consciousness to the denotations denominated by specific proper names (e.g. the Olympic bear flying into the sky – *the 1980 Olympics*).

The combination of allusive techniques in which PPNs serve as key signs, demonstrates the range of ways to influence efficiently the intellectual and emotional spheres of the audience's consciousness. In a compact (in terms of length and content) form of advertising videotext, precedent signs of the "History" sphere of concepts help to convey political messages a symbolic and figurative way. They also allow to illustrate a politician's attitude to certain phenomena of social and historical dynamics and, hence, set the value orientations to be shared and supported by his/her voters.

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