

**NININS 2020****International Scientific Forum «National Interest, National Identity and National Security»****THREATENING STRATEGY IN PRE-ELECTION DISCOURSE**

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olvnov@mail.ru**Abstract**

The authors of this article consider the question of pragmatic effect of statements with the meaning of threat in Russian pre-election discourse. The main goal of this article is to find out cognitive means to study and systematize pragmatic effect of threatening statements in a political pre-election discourse. Communicative construct of pre-election threat is used to describe the basic threatening strategy of pragmatic effect on voters' dispositions of emotional state. The chosen cognitive tool made it possible to evaluate intensity of the pragmatic effect of the pre-election threats on voters. The authors managed to design V. Putin's communicative construct of pre-election threat and to reveal his basic threatening strategy. The study opens up wide possibilities for interpreting the directions of the pragmatic effect on voters by the mean of threatening statements. The authors come to the conclusion that the basic threatening strategy includes not only the process (technology) of forming voters' uncomfortable emotional state, but also the mechanism of returning them to a comfortable state, since the voter who is constantly in discomfort, in anxiety or stress, will not be able to make decisions. These results can be used in predicting pragmatic effect of politician's threatening statements on voters.

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## **1. Introduction**

Political discourse is a special type of communicative interaction the main purpose of which is “the conquest, keeping and the use of a state power by a politician” (Romanov, 2002, p. 35). In this regard, political discourse is formed by different politician's speech (discursive) practices formed according to typical models (scheme, frame) of statements (Rehbein, 1977; Romanov, 2002), marked by various language means and oriented to the process of politician's power conquest as well as to draw voters' attention. Undoubtedly, political discourse is closely related to aggressive verbal behaviour and the struggle for power of conflicting political parties.

Candidates actively introduce their ideas of country's main problems in the context of political discourse and face opponents' opinion in debates, and meetings. Therefore, it becomes possible for them to use statements with the meaning of threat (threat-statements), threatening statements or threatenings. In this research statements with the meaning of threat are language practices containing politician's declaration of negative actions / sanctions directed at either voters or the opposition and forming voters' affirmative or uncomfortable emotional state (Romanov & Novoselova, 2020) to cause them to perform a certain action, i.e., to vote for the politician.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Obviously, it is possible to state that threatening statements are an important component of pre-election programmes of the presidential candidates in Russia in 2018. Besides, there are 229 threatening statements in pre-election programmes. It means that threatenings are written speech acts of politician and his team's careful work in contrast to politician's unprepared verbal statements with the meaning of threat at different debates with his participation. In other words, threatening statements are consciously realized by politicians in the thematic space of pre-election discourse, and such statements are not a reflection or result of politician's momentary, spontaneous, affirmed or uncomfortable emotional state. Moreover, pre-election programmes of the presidential candidates are drawn up with due regard for their deliberate and purposeful use in the communicative coordinates of the speaking subject I – Here – Now.

## **3. Research Questions**

The active usage of threatening statements by the presidential candidates in Russia raises the question of pragmatic effectiveness of this functional type of communicative practices as an important component of pre-election discourse. For this reason, it seems appropriate to pay attention to the threatening as an agitation and political resource used in Russian pre-election company by each of the presidential candidates in 2018, and study pragmatic potential of such statements in pre-election discourse. In particular, the aim of this article is to find out the basic threatening strategy of politician's influence on voters as well as to choose an adequate cognitive tool to represent linguistic and cognitive organization of this strategy. In addition, it is necessary to analyze the intensity of pragmatic and emotional effect of pre-election threatening statements and answer the following questions: Why some candidates' statements with the meaning of threat turned out to be able to influence the mass audience of

voters, but other candidates' threats did not. It is also interesting to know what kind of threatening consequences (sanctions) were used by the candidates who managed to get the most votes.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

It is important to take into account the cognitive complexity of estimating the intense “depth” of pragmatic and emotional effect of statements of any intentionality, including threatening, since this estimating should not contain any subjective interpretations and be based on researchers' personal political preferences (Anglin, 1970; Gazdar, 1979; Partee, 1984). Therefore, it is necessary to choose a cognitive tool to study and systematize pragmatic and emotional effect of pre-election threatenings on a mass audience. It means that we should find out some cognitive tool that will allow us to study language structures in a close connection with the structures of consciousness (Aitchison, 1996; Romanov, 2002; Schlenker et al., 1990; Schlenker & Barry, 2003).

The choice of such an adequate method is a rather complicated task as there are a considerable number of ways to organize and classify various forms of knowledge at all levels of a person's cognitive ability and his communicative activity in the space of everyday life scenarios. However, there are practically no generally accepted “objective” methods in the world of events, actions and meanings. But it would be appropriate to propose such a semantic frame as communicative construct (Romanova, 2009) to evaluate pragmatic and emotional effect of pre-election threatenings and structure them.

#### **5. Research Methods**

It's known that communicative construct is a semantic element of a higher level than concept, it is “interpretation of mental representation as specific language of thinking” (Petrov, 1990, p. 230) and it can be used to interpret, evaluate and predict the events of the surrounding world, one's own and other people's behaviour (Givon, 1995; Goodfellow, 2001; Kjell & Zigler, 1997; Kelli, 2000). If we follow the logical tradition formally, we can find out that communicative construct is a type of relationships between concept-antonyms (speaker vs. listener, addresser vs. addressee, subject vs. object, etc.) in a social interaction. This type of relationship is known as opposition in logic and it implies that there is at least one average element referring to the same type of objects in addition to the concepts-antonyms. In other words, the relationship of opposition implies the continual nature of elements, for example, there is an instruction as a middle element between order and request in directives, there is an affected emotional state between comfort and discomfort in threats.

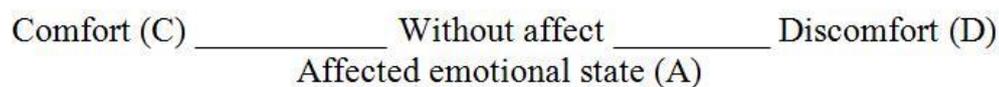
In particular, communicative construct of pre-election threat or threatening construct of pre-election discourse can be used to interpret and evaluate pragmatic and emotional effect of pre-election threatenings (more about communicative construct of threat see at: (Novoselova et al., 2015). In a cognitive plan the most important elements to reflect the experience gained in a form of threatening construct are I-addressee's modalities (in our case I-voter) as a cognitive agent. Such modalities can represent voters' self-perception based on the situation in the country and abroad, and they have a well-defined location (disposition) on the content continuum of the communicative construct. Another important element of the communicative construct of pre-election threat is modalities of I-addresser of

threatening statements (in our case I-politician) as a cognitive agent which reflect his self-perception and his political activities.

It is important to clarify that the elements of the threatening construct are I-voter's and I-politician's modalities formed by politician's threat-statements. Such statements have specific semantic characteristics and different pragmatic effect on voters' emotional state. So, pre-election statements with the meaning of threat are capable of taking voters out of a comfort state and forming a wide range of their emotional states. This kind of statements can form voters' lightly affected emotional state characterized by "affecting" their positive or negative experiences in political discourse and their feelings of discomfort. In addition, verbal form of politician's pre-election threatenings is influenced by his affected or uncomfortable emotional state.

It is possible to indicate I-politician's (I-speaker's) and I-voter's (I-listener's, I-addressee's) modalities on the communicative construct of pre-election threat. So, this construct is a certain type of relationship between such elements of the contrary nature as I-politician's and I-voter's comfortable and uncomfortable emotional state, and there is an affirmed emotional state as an average (medium) element in construct of threat (Novoselova et al., 2015; Romanov & Novoselova, 2020). In other words, communicative construct of pre-election threat represents a certain type of relationship between the concepts of antonymous plan and is characterized by continuance.

The communicative construct of pre-election threat has comfort and discomfort as opposite poles and affected emotional state as average (neutral) element. Opposition of relationships between comfortable and uncomfortable emotional states and movement from the point of comfort (C) to the point of discomfort (D) can be graphically represented in the form of a certain line passing through affected emotional state (A) (Figure 01):



**Figure 1.** Communicative construct of pre-election threat

The disposition "Without affect" divides the communicative construct of pre-election threat into two equal parts with the centre at point 0 ("zero", i.e. "Without affect") where the left part of the construct corresponds to political discourse participants' affirmative positive experiences (+ A), the right one corresponds to their negative experiences (-A). In addition, the disposition "No affect" serves as a cognitive (mental) point of I-politician's and I-voter's affirmative positive or negative states. In particular, I-politician and an I-voter's dispositions may correspond to a point (disposition) + A or a point (disposition) -A.

Moreover, each element of the construct has a definite position on the content continuum of communicative construct. When moving along its content continuum from left to right or from point (C) to point (D) the discomfort increases, and so increases the intensity of the pragmatic effect of threat-statements on the mass recipient. Of course, voters' emotional state will not be comfortable at the central

point of threatening construct, since there was a realization of a pre-election statement with the meaning of threat.

There are dispositions of peak experiences or dispositions (C and D), average dispositions (+A and -A), zero point or disposition (0; “No affect”) differing in the intense “depth” of their pragmatic effect on the addressee of threat (I-voter) but functioning within the framework of “pre-election threat”. The following figure shows I-speaker’s and I-hearer’s possible dispositions of emotional states in the communicative construct of pre-election threat (Figure 02):



**Figure 2.** Possible dispositions of emotional states

This scheme demonstrates the possible set of I-politician's and I-voter's dispositions of emotional states on the communicative construct of pre-election threat. It suggests that this construct is a functional and semantic space of pre-election threat or threatening regulative actions (more about regulatives, see Romanov, 2002). Undoubtedly almost any statement with the meaning of the threat realized in candidate’s pre-election program is used to form one of the possible I-voter’s disposition on the content continuum of threatening construct (Novoselova et al., 2015). At the same time, all possible manifestations of I-modalities forms the illocutionary content of typical threatening construct in the mental space of cognitive agent.

## 6. Findings

The pre-election discourse of presidential candidates in Russia is formed by 229 threatening statements in 2018. It’s well known that any politician begins political struggle to cause people to vote for him or his party. Of course, illocutionary aim of pre-election statements with the meaning of the threat is an appearance of voters’ uncomfortable emotional state and encouraging them to perform some actions caused by politician, i.e., to vote for him. So, politicians use threatening statements to move disposition of the I-voter towards the uncomfortable emotional state along the content continuum of communicative construct of pre-election threat. In this regard, Putin’s threatenings are of most interest, since he won the election in 2018.

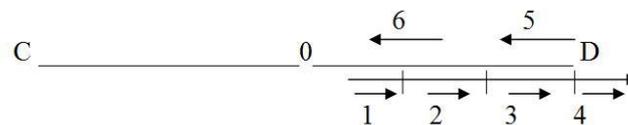
Thus, the research material allows us to identify the basic threatening strategy of politician’s influence on the I-voter's dispositions. As a rule, the politician uses statements with the meaning of threat not to form voters’ peak dispositions of uncomfortable emotional state but to provide a certain pragmatic and emotional effect on a voter in order to move I-voter's disposition of emotional state to the right (in the affirmed emotional state) on the content continuum of threatening construct. Indeed, politician understand that voters in affected emotional state can easily return to a comfort because they have confidence in the fact that it is easy for them to return to a comfortable state having decided to vote for a politician. On the contrary, voters in a state of discomfort (D) will not be able to make a confident decision on the preference of a candidate.

The basic threatening strategy provides an opportunity for politicians to vary the intensity of pragmatic and emotional effect of their threat-statements on voters, weakening the intensity of the threatening influence on I-voters or bringing voters to uncomfortable emotional state or state of discomfort. It is important to draw attention to Putin's pre-election threatenings and his threatening strategy. Politician consciously used 12 threat-statements in his pre-election program. He directs his threat-statements to the target audience (to most likely voters) and focuses his attention on them in his pre-election political discourse. His threats are characterized by different pragmatic and emotional effect on voters. Obviously, the politician starts to form voters' affected emotional state at the beginning of his program materials. For example, he uses threatening statements (1) The coming years will be decisive for the future of the country, (2) Today's decisions determine Russia's future for decades.

Politician didn't afraid to form voters' peak dispositions of emotional state. So, he gradually increases the intensity of its pragmatic effect on voters in threatening statements (3) The speed of technological changes is growing rapidly and (4) And the one who uses this technological wave will break out far ahead. Also politician wants to keep voters in affected emotional state by some pre-election threats. For example, he declares voters' impossibility to drop out of affected emotional state without performing some actions caused by him. Politician uses the following threats for it (5) And the importance of this challenge requires us to give the same strong response and (6) We are ready to give such an answer. Politician calls on voters to resist the challenges threatening the successful development of the country. He weakens the pragmatic effect on voters and gradually returns them to comfortable or affected emotional state.

Of course, addressees of these pre-election threat-statements are voters but the negative consequences aren't targeted at them because these statements declare punishment to other people who wants to do nothing for development in the country. This kind of threats is used by Vladimir Putin to maintain voters' negative attitude to different parties and to motivate and encourage electors to vote for him.

Putin's threat-statements marked with numbers can be displayed on the threatening construct of pre-election discourse (Figure 03):



**Figure 3.** Threatening construct of V. Putin's pre-election discourse

Unit designations are the following: the arrows to right and the arrows to left show the directions of politician's threatening influence on I-voter's dispositions.

The communicative construct of Putin's pre-election threat makes it possible to visualize how politician gradually increases the pragmatic effect on voter's disposition of emotional state in the first four statements (see four arrows to right with numbers 1, 2, 3, 4) and then weakens his pragmatic effect (see two arrows to left with numbers 5 and 6). It is obvious that Putin effects I-voter's disposition of emotional state by the mean of pre-election threat in a way that form voters' uncomfortable emotional

state (movement to right on a content continuum of the communicative construct of pre-election threat). So politician changes voters' emotional state to cause them to vote for him, but he gives them ability to return to their comfort state, but they should perform actions caused by him.

Basic threatening strategy chosen by Putin became effective in the Russian pre-election discourse in 2018 as the politician managed to get 76.6 % of voters (URL: <http://vibory-rf.ru/rezultaty-vyborov-prezidenta-rossii-2018>). This strategy allowed the politician to form different emotional states of voters varying their emotional state by the mean of threat-statements. At the same time, the politician used different themes of threat-statements concerning the most actual problems of the country's development and the ways of its further cooperation with the world community. However, it is important that the politician does not leave his voters in an uncomfortable emotional state, but offers them ways to overcome difficulties that help them restore their comfortable state and a sense of security (see arrow to right at Putin's communicative construct of pre-election threat).

## **7. Conclusion**

The study opens up wide possibilities for interpreting the directions of the pragmatic effect on voters by the mean of threatening statements, and the choice of such an adequate cognitive tool as communicative construct of pre-election threat made it possible to describe the basic threatening strategy in political communication. The chosen cognitive tool is used to evaluate the intensity of pragmatic effect of the pre-election threats on voters.

The study has enabled us to design Putin's communicative construct of pre-election threat and to reveal his basic threatening strategy. It is important to note that Putin's threat-statements were about urgent problems of the country's development, including challenges in foreign affairs. It was found out that he uses threat-statements not to form voters' peak uncomfortable dispositions but to form their affected emotional state. Indeed, the formation of voters' affected emotional state will cause them to decide to vote for the politician in order to return to a comfortable state. In other words, it is also obvious that the forming peak voters' dispositions is not an effective means of political communication. Besides, Putin managed not only to bring voters into a state of discomfort, but also to anchor in their minds the possibility of moving from a point of discomfort to comfort along the content continuum of the communicative construct.

The authors come to the conclusion that basic threatening strategy includes not only the process (technology) of forming voters' uncomfortable emotional state by the mean of statements with the meaning of threat but also the mechanism of returning them to a comfortable emotional state, since the voter who is constantly in discomfort, in anxiety or stress, will not be able to make decisions. Of course, the election results are influenced by a large number of factors, including the politician's ability to campaign, establish contact with voters, and also see the country's development prospects. However, there is a reason to speak of a tendency. Threatenings can be pragmatically effective in pre-election discourse if they form voters' uncomfortable emotional state and guarantee them a return to a comfort.

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