

SCTCMG 2021
International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of
Modern Globalism»

VERBAL METHODS OF DISCREDITING THE AUTHORITIES IN
THE COMMENTS IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

Melnik Natalya Vladimirovna (a)*, Mityakina Olga Viktorovna (b)

*Corresponding author

(a) Kemerovo State University, 6, Krasnay St., Kemerovo, Russia, saikova@mail.ru

(b) Kemerovo State University, 6, Krasnay St., Kemerovo, Russia, olgamityakina72@mail.ru

Abstract

The article is devoted to identifying speech techniques and linguistic means of implementing strategies and tactics used to discredit the current government by users of social networks. The tactics of achieving a strategy for downgrading and methods of their implementation have been determined. In the course of the work, the methods of linguistic description and continuous sampling were used. The material of the research was the Internet comments of users to the addresses of the Mayor of New York, posted on the official pages of social networks Twitter and Facebook. The effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the implementation of the goals of communication within the framework of political discourse can be traced by examining Internet comments, in which the attitude towards the personality of a politician is formed. The content of Internet users' comments shows that, as a percentage, the comments defamatory of the authorities make up 85 %. Approval of the politician's actions can be traced in 5 % of comments, and the remaining 10 % have nothing to do with the content of the publication. The study made it possible to reveal that the language means with a negative evaluative component used by the author of the commentary form among readers a negative attitude towards the authorities in the person of the current Mayor of New York. It has been established that the choice of linguistic means by commentators is primarily due to subjective factors. The authors of the comments, expressing their opinion, assess the actions of the Mayor.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Internet comments, linguistic means, power discrediting, strategies and tactics



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

1. Introduction

The problem of studying a linguistic personality is one of the most urgent today. The anthropocentric paradigm of modern science has influenced the integration of various fields of scientific knowledge, forming several new directions that put the linguistic personality at the center of attention. One of such areas can be considered linguistic personalology. Linguopersonological studies are based on the analysis of the text as a product of the speech activity of the linguistic personality.

The study of the main mechanisms of speech influence in political communication is carried out through the implementation of the communicative function of the language within the framework of political texts. In recent decades, political communication, or political discourse (following Sheigal, we consider these concepts as synonymous), has become the object of study of many linguists, in whose works the mechanisms of generation and functioning of political texts are considered, political metaphors are analyzed as a way of understanding the world politicians, speech strategies in political activity are investigated, speech behavior of politicians is studied (Budaev & Chudinov, 2020). According to Skrabtsova, the existence of numerous approaches to the study of this phenomenon leads to a revision of the content of the concept of “political discourse”. If earlier the focus was mainly on genres that

To the maximum extent correspond to the main purpose of political communication – the struggle for power (public speeches of politicians, parliamentary debates, official documents), then recently researchers are increasingly turning to the analysis of political advertising, memoirs of politicians, media discourse and other border genres. (Skrebtsova, 2018, p. 274)

Sheigal (2000), touching upon the question of what speech genres are included in the sphere of political discourse, notes that any discourse, including political:

Being a conglomerate of certain genres, is a field structure, in the center of which are genres prototypical for this type of discourse, and on the periphery – secondary (or marginal) genres that have a dual nature and are at the junction of different types of discourse. (p. 136)

Thus, the prospects for studying political discourse are obvious. Further research will make it possible to more fully reveal the specifics of modern political communication, its dependence on the factors of the addressee and the addressee, the communicative and political situation. The effectiveness of the implementation of political discourse can be traced by examining Internet comments, in which the attitude towards the personality of a politician is formed. At the same time, Sukhanov (2018) considers the speech behavior of the subject of political discourse as a multifaceted and complex phenomenon determined by the intentions of the communicant. Besides, the researcher believes that politicians in the struggle for power use all possible means to effectively implement the strategies and tactics of political discourse.

The undermining of the legitimacy of power is observed in those countries in which society is heterogeneous for economic, political, social reasons, and the United States is no exception. The forms of

expressing dissatisfaction with the policies of the current government can be very different: from protests to comments on social networks. The latter plays a special role since their content indirectly or explicitly affects human consciousness. Readers perceive information and form their opinion and perception of the situation. According to van Dijk (1988), “people who understand real events or speech events can construct a mental representation, and especially a meaningful representation, only if they have a more general knowledge of such events”. Thus, through private statements in social networks, a collective idea is formed about one of the fragments of the picture of the world, namely about the political situation in the country.

The study of linguistic means representing the exchange of political information (i.e., political communication) is engaged in political linguistics. According to Sidorova (2018):

Political communication, from the point of view of the study of speech activity, is focused on the emotional impact on the addressee and propaganda in modern society, prompting the recipient to make political and social decisions in conditions of pluralism of opinions. (p. 92)

Linguistic manipulation of consciousness is carried out using certain strategies and tactics. Strategy, as a speech activity directed at the reader, is realized with the help of certain tactics. As Kopnina (2017) notes, any tactics we use to achieve the goals of communication, in essence, carries the character of manipulation, which is “a type of psychological influence, the skillful execution of which leads to the latent arousal of another person's intentions that do not coincide with his actual desires” (p. 150).

2. Problem Statement

Of undoubted interest is the study of the main mechanisms of speech influence in political communication, which is carried out through the implementation of the communicative function of the language within the framework of political texts. In this regard, it seems important to identify the mechanism of speech impact on a person and study his feedback using social networks. The practice of virtual communication shows that Internet comments on messages on political topics have become widespread, and therefore the modern form of computer-mediated communication has turned out to be capable of demonstrating the everyday political consciousness of society.

A thematic analysis of the texts of Internet commentaries to the speeches of modern politicians shows that there is a decrease in support for the authorities, tension is growing, and therefore dissatisfaction with the policy of the authorities, so the problem of undermining the legitimacy of the current government seems significant. In their study, Kahn and Boyer note that users of social networks with many subscribers have a high level of political activity (Kahne & Bowyer, 2018).

From a linguistic point of view, the linguistic means and speech techniques used by representatives of different linguistic cultures, used by representatives of different linguistic cultures, are of scientific interest, aimed at implementing a strategy to lower the current power in the texts of Internet comments, comprehended in a linguo-personalological manner. The originality of our research lies in the choice of strategies and tactics, which is determined by both objective and subjective factors; in the work, we single out precisely subjective / linguo-personalological factors: semantic and rhetorical means,

cognitive mechanisms. Even though in recent years publications have appeared that investigate, in the linguo-personalological aspect, the use of speech strategies and tactics of delegitimation by real native speakers, many questions in this direction remain open, and therefore the study seems relevant.

3. Research Questions

Our research addresses the following issues:

1. Analysis of the speech representation of strategies and tactics aimed at discrediting the current government based on the material of Internet comments.
2. Identification, analysis, and systematization of linguistic means aimed at forming a negative image of a political personality in social networks.

4. Purpose of the Study

In our work, we aim to differentiate speech techniques and linguistic means according to the principle of effectiveness/ineffectiveness of implementing a strategy to reduce and group the investigated means of implementing tactics based on semantic invariants with a negative assessment of a politician in the context of Internet comments.

To solve this goal, the following tasks are required: to determine the tactics of the speech implementation of the strategy for a fall; to analyze specific techniques expressed by linguistic means for the implementation of tactics, to highlight the most effective and frequent language models that actualize the semantic invariants of speech tactics for assessing the image of a politician by an ordinary linguistic personality.

5. Research Methods

The authorities are being discredited not only at the federal, but also at the regional level. We consider online comments on the posts of New York Mayor Bill de Blasio as examples of discrediting the authorities.

The material of the research is the Internet comments of users to the address of the Mayor of New York, posted on the official pages of social networks Twitter and Facebook. To solve the set goal and objectives, the methods of linguistic description and continuous sampling were used.

The Internet comments were stimulated by the Mayor's publications on the Internet related to the events that took place in America.

Consider one of the most resonant publications, which is an appeal by Bill de Blasio to the brother of the deceased George Floyd and the city's residents, in which he expresses gratitude for the invitation to honor the memory of the deceased and promises to make real transformations in the life of the city. Recall that African American George Floyd was killed by police during his arrest near a grocery store after reporting an attempt to sell counterfeit money on May 25 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA. His death provoked riots. Demonstrations against the existing government swept across the country. According to media reports, it turned out that the daughter of the Mayor of New York, Karja de Blasio, was also detained during the mass protests. 797 people commented on this post.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: *To George Floyd's brother, Terrence: thank you for inviting Chirlane and me today and for working to bring our city together. To my fellow New Yorkers, I hear your anger and your grief. And I promise you we won't let this moment pass without real reform (Hereinafter, the spelling and punctuation of the commentary texts are preserved in the author's presentation)* [<https://www.facebook.com/NYCMayor/posts/to-george-floyds-brother-terrence-thank-you-for-inviting-chirlane-and-me-today-a/10158154978476166/>]

In his address, Bill de Blasio uses a strategy of submission, using “positive stimulation”: gratitude for the invitation, sympathy for the people of New York, the promise to bring order to the life of the city. The Mayor recognizes the existing problem and invites the people to unite to cope with it together. For this, in his address, the politician uses the pronoun *we*, showing unity with the people. Using in his speech the verbs of sensory perception *hear u promise*, the pronoun *I*, de Blasio seeks to give his speech persuasiveness.

For the analysis, a continuous sample of comments was carried out. As a result, it was revealed that the percentage of comments discrediting the authorities is 85 %. Approval of the politician's actions is traced in 5 % of comments, and the remaining 10 % have nothing to do with the content of the publication.

6. Findings

The analysis of Internet comments showed that the strategy for a fall is implemented with the help of certain tactics: analysis-“minus” tactics, insult tactics, accusation tactics, threat tactics, tactics of using non-verbal communication means.

Let us consider the implementation of each tactic with specific examples. The analysis – “minus” tactic does not openly express a negative attitude towards politics, but the use of such linguistic means as imperative, passive voice, comparison, irony, forms a negative image of power in the person of the incumbent Mayor.

Peter Burka: *You invested in even more cops. Resign.*

Michael Anthony: *I will increase my investments in NYC when you are run out of office. This city cannot survive another Mayor like you.*

The author of the first commentary suggests that budget funds are being spent for other purposes, does not trust the words of the mayor, and uses the Resign imperative to induce other participants in the communication to act.

In the following commentary, the subordinate clause *when you are run out of office* carries the semantics of the verb *Resign*, the passive voice shows that the Mayor will not leave the office of his own free will. The negative connotation of *cannot survive* construction is conveyed through irony since the true meaning contradicts the explicit one. Thus, the author expresses his lack of confidence in the actions of the Mayor. Comparison with *another Mayor like you* contributes to the disclosure of the author's perception of the world, revealing the subject-evaluative attitude of the commentator. In his opinion, the Mayor cannot be worse.

In our study, the tactic of insult is embodied through slang, pejoratives, invectives, phraseological units and takes place in the following examples. **Kathryn Michael: *Bro then stop the overtime NYPD!!!! It is hemorrhaging cash from NYC budgets!!!!***

Olivia: *It will take the next Mayor of NYC to dig us out of the mess you created over 7 years. It's so sad what NYC has become under your watch.*

Rob Taub: *Have you ever ridden the subway with us little people. Despot.*

Nick: *Worst Mayor in NY history. Get out of the way of progress please.*

PaSwede: *My sense is that De Blasio is freaking out.*

The commentator under the nickname Kathryn Michael uses exclamation marks to enhance the expressiveness of his statement, which indicates that the author wants to be heard. The imperative mood, expressed by the verb *stop*, and the slang lexeme *Bro*, convey a familiar attitude towards the Mayor.

In the following commentary, the author conveys his negative emotional mood using the metaphor *dig out*, the pejorative *mess*, and the evaluative slang syntagma *Bro* referring to the Mayor.

The authors, using invectives *Worst*, *Despot* in their comments, try to interpret the information in their own way. The commentator under the nickname **PaSwede**, using the phraseological unit *is freaking out* expresses disdain and sarcasm in relation to the politician. The use of such techniques contributes to the achievement of the manipulative goals of the authors and indicates a derogatory attitude towards the Mayor.

In the next group of comments, the selection of linguistic means with a negative component (irony, vernacular, metaphor, hypophora, precedent phenomenon) is due to the implementation of the tactics of the accusation. **Joshua Robert: *The great irony here is that last week you were thinking about PREVENTING a guy with \$14 billion who wanted to invest in NYC from doing so. Why did you give Steve Cohen such a hard time? You should have rolled out the red carpet, but you had an agenda and favors to give....***

Art Tompson: *The more investment equals more opportunity for Chirlane to dip her beak.*

The emotional coloring of the author's speech is given by the lexeme *irony*, supported by the adjective **great** the lexeme **PREVENTING**, written in capital letters, the colloquial word *guy*, a metaphor **such a hard time**. This commentary uses the method of dialogization of monologue speech (hypophore). The author himself asks the question and himself answers it, and thus focuses the attention of the addressee on the problem of investment. Using the precedent expression, the *red carpet*, which suggests a lavish meeting, the commentator accuses de Blasio of inaction, saying that he should have happily accepted Cohen's proposal, but it turned out that the Mayor had his plan. Such a stylistic means adds emotion and imagery to the commentary. There is a contradiction between the Mayor's call to invest in the city's economy and his real actions.

In order to aggressively influence the addressee, the **threat** tactics are embodied using the following rhetorical techniques: pejorative, imperative, idiom. **Joshua Robert: *The great irony here is that last week you were thinking about PREVENTING a guy with \$14 billion who wanted to invest in NYC from doing so. Why did you give Steve Cohen such a hard time? You should have rolled out the red carpet, but you had an agenda and favors to give***

Art Tompson: *The more investment equals more opportunity for Chirlane to dip her beak.*

In a comment by Kevin Amy Waters, the idiom Nothing short is used to highlight the token resignation. In this short speech work, the author uses the pejorative no Mayor, jail through which speech aggression is manifested.

In the following commentary, the author expresses his emotionality by using capital letters in the words IGNORANCE N INCOMPETENCE, the semantic meaning of which is negative. The author, accusing the Mayor of ignorance, incapacity, also shows verbal aggression, thereby discrediting the politician in front of the readers of such a commentary.

The text material of the third Internet commentary is in tune with the military slogan *Go home*, popular in the sixties of the last century, addressed to American soldiers with an appeal to return to their home country. Thus, the author is trying to express dissatisfaction with the fact that the Mayor is still in office. The use of the imperative construct expressed by the verb *go* is a sign of **threat** tactics.

Mention should also be made of the comments, which are presented not only by verbal means but also by the presence of a non-verbal component. For example, the author under the nickname Lo Fi, in addition to his comment: *Stop pretending you care*, is attaching a photo that shows police armed with batons crowding the ranks of unarmed peaceful demonstrators. The photo is used to make the event more convincing and to give meaning to the events taking place. The implementation of the tactics of using non-verbal communication means increases the suggestive potential of the commentary.

7. Conclusion

Linguistic means with a negative evaluative component, used by the author, form a negative image of power in the person of the current Mayor of New York. The effectiveness of applying the strategy to decrease is achieved with the help of speech tactics, analysis – “minus”, accusations, insults, threats, tactics of using means of non-verbal communication. These tactics, in turn, are implemented through the following techniques: negative image, dismissive tone, the irony. The use of various stylistic means in the speech of commentators affects the minds of readers and encourages them to make decisions. The authors of the comments hope that the negative attitude towards the authorities will be passed on to the readers.

Acknowledgments

The research was carried out with the financial support of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research within the framework of the scientific project No. 19-012-00522 “The problem of legitimization in political discourse: linguistic and personalological aspect”.

References

- Budaev, E. V., & Chudinov, A. P. (2020). Political Metaphorology at the Present Stage of Development (2010–2019). *Issues of Cognitive Linguistics*, 3, 56–70.
- Dijk van, T. A. (1988). *Discourse and power*. URSS.
- Kahne, J., & Bowyer, B. (2018). The Political Significance of Social Media Activity and Social Networks. *Political Communication*, 35(3), 470–493.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2018.1426662>
- Kopnina, G. A. (2017). *Speech manipulation*. Nauka.
- Shegal, E. L. (2000). *Semiotics of political discourse*. Classroom.

- Sidorova, N. A., Stepanov, S. A., & Limarova, E. V. (2018). *Political discourse – language manipulation*. ITC.
- Skrebtsova, T. G. (2018). *Cognitive linguistics: classical theories, new approaches*. Publishing House Jask.
- Sukhanov, Y. Y. (2018). Political discourse as object of linguistic analysis. *RUDN Journal of Language Studies, Semiotics and Semantics*, 9(1), 200–212. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2299-2018-9-1-200-212>.