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**POLITICAL MANIPULATION IN THE MEDIA:**  
**PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ASPECT**

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**Abstract**

This article discusses the results of an experimental study of strategies and tactics of political manipulation in the media, considered both from the standpoint of generating speech and from the point of view of its perception, and demonstrates the high epistemological potential of a psycholinguistic experiment projected onto the study of the field of everyday political communication. This is the originality of the author's approach to the study of the problem. The material was the text of the political news "Putin signed a law on the free collection of deadwood" from the website Lenta.ru and comments to it. The study made it possible to reveal that the author chooses a strategy for manipulating the reader's mass consciousness but implements it with the help of different tactics. Evidence that most of the readers were manipulatively influenced is contained in the interpretation of the results of the psycholinguistic experiment. The participants in the experiment were asked to comment on the news posted on the Lenta.ru website. In general, we can say that they have been manipulated, while less reacted to the tactics of personification. The respondents' reaction to the transformed text differed from the comments to the primary news: for example, the comments received during the experiment turned out to be more diverse, this is since, in the absence of manipulative techniques, the respondents had a need to develop their reaction, relying on pre-textual attitudes and received from news facts.

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## 1. Introduction

The relevance of the study is due to the action of integral trends in science, which are manifested, among other things, in the projection of methods and techniques of psycholinguistics into related areas in the field of linguopersonology, linguo-political science, and Internet communication. The objects of study are specific political figures, certain political genres, strategies and tactics of manipulation, as well as the interpretation of texts by readers on various, including political, topics. Texts are investigated both in the field of professional political communication and in the field of every day (naïve) linguistics.

At the same time, the mass media are an important link in the transmission of this or that information, including of a political nature. In the modern world, they significantly affect the formation of social values. With the development of the Internet, the media can reach a large audience, which allows us to talk about the manipulation of mass consciousness.

## 2. Problem Statement

The present study is devoted to the study of strategies and tactics of political manipulation in the media while focusing on both the addressee who created the primary text and the addressees (news comments) who interpret the note.

The main attention in the works carried out on the topic of political manipulation in the media is focused on the choice of strategies and tactics by representatives of the ruling elite aimed at retaining power, in this regard; it becomes necessary to manipulate the mass consciousness of an ordinary native speaker.

The dilemma of the research lies in the correlation between the use of certain strategies and tactics with different potential for manipulative influence and the types of reactions of commentators.

## 3. Research Questions

During the experiment, the following hypotheses were put forward:

1) readers will not personify the power, since the text does not use the personification strategy, that is, the author does not broadcast his point of view on the topic to the readers and does not name specific representatives of the political elite;

2) readers will use pre-text attitudes and knowledge. This is since, firstly, the transformed text contains little information, and secondly, the author does not direct the respondents' attention in the direction he needs, using manipulative techniques;

3) readers' opinions will be more diverse than in the comments from Lenta.ru, since the responses of respondents will not be influenced by strategies and tactics of manipulation; they will have an opinion based on facts, pre-textual attitudes, etc.;

4) comments will mainly be on the topic of the news. This hypothesis is explained by the peculiarity of the experiment: Internet users wrote comments based only on their desires, while respondents were forced to answer the question they were asked. Besides, this happens due to the format of the Internet: newsreaders write comments under a fictitious nickname, not knowing whether anyone

will read them or not. The participants in the experiment are aware that their reactions will be paid attention to;

5) there will be no direct insults to the authorities while commenting on the first text. It seems that respondents when filling out the questionnaire feel more responsible than Web users when leaving a comment on the news. Also, this hypothesis is associated with the lack of implementation of the personification tactics in the text developed for the experiment.

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

The purpose of the article is to present the strategies and tactics of political language manipulation, as well as to assess their effectiveness, identified by analyzing the comments of readers and participants in the psycholinguistic experiment. To achieve the goal, it is necessary to solve the following range of tasks: 1) creation of an empirical research base by observing the features of the speech behavior of commentators on the Lenta.ru site and analyzing the results of the psycholinguistic experiment; 2) highlighting strategies and tactics of manipulation in the text of news from the site Lenta.ru; 3) evaluation of the effectiveness of the selected strategies and tactics, identified from the comments to the original news and the transformed text, obtained during the psycholinguistic experiment; 4) comparison of comments to the primary and transformed texts.

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

The study used the method of psycholinguistic experiment.

For the first time, the question of the need for an experiment in linguistics was raised by Shcherba (1974) in his article “On the three-fold aspect of linguistic phenomena and an experiment in linguistics” (p. 28). Shakhnarovich (1974) wrote: “The purpose of a scientific experiment is to artificially cause a phenomenon to be studied so that, observing this phenomenon, we can more deeply and fully cognize it” (p. 191). In his work “Linguistic experiment as a method of linguistic and psycholinguistic research” it is noted that an experiment in linguistics serves to verify the model built by the researcher (Shakhnarovich, 1974, p. 194). Psycholinguistic techniques are effective in studying the perception and generation of text (Bogin, 2001; Dryze, 1984; Dryze & Leontiev, 1976; Stern, 1992; Yagunova, 2008; Zalevskaya, 2001), including in the field of political communication (Bulatova, 2016; Repina, 2012).

This article presents the results of comparing the responses of respondents to the texts on the law on the collection of deadwood: to the original and transformed. In total, 60 people of different ages took part in the experiment – from 20 to 62 years old, thus, 416 comments to the news, as well as 60 questionnaires, served as the material for the study.

The news “Putin signed a law on the free collection of deadwood” was published on the website Lenta.ru on April 18, 2018. Here is the text of the note (in the previous article, we presented a linguo-stylistic analysis of this text and highlighted the strategies and tactics implemented in it (Golyanskaya & Melnik, 2019).

*Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law that allows Russians to freely collect deadwood in the forest for their own needs. The corresponding document was published on the official portal of legal information.*

*The law, adopted by the State Duma on April 3, 2018, will enter into force in 2019. Amendments have been made to the Forestry Code. They will allow you to harvest and collect tree trunks or parts thereof, twigs and branches that have fallen to the ground for your own needs. According to the document, deadwood is a non-timber forest resource.*

*The first deputy head of the United Russia faction, Andrei Isaev, commenting on the initiative to allow the free collection of deadwood, noted that his heart simply rejoices. The adoption of the bill has delighted many netizens. According to them, the State Duma is finally allowing something, not forbidding it. "Only 10 years have passed, and the population has already been allowed to collect deadwood!" – notes the user Mikhail Svetlov. "Deadwood is a national treasure! Dreams come true!" – says the Twitter account "Valezchnik Nash" (Lenta.ru. 18.04.2018).*

Below we present the transformed text that was used in the psycholinguistic experiment. Note that this text is also organized according to the structure of the news – headline, lead, and main part:

*Forest Resource Law signed*

*The law on one of the forest resources was signed and published on the portal of legal information.*

*This law was adopted in April 2018 and entered into force in 2019. Amendments have been made to the Forestry Code. Now people can harvest wood for their own needs.*

## **6. Findings**

Let us analyze the reactions to the text that was transformed for the experiment. The news was presented to the respondents in the first place so that manipulative strategies and tactics, which can be highlighted in a note posted on the Lenta.ru website, would not affect its perception.

The respondents expressed their opinion about the government in Russia, even though none of its representatives is mentioned in the text (21.6 % of all reactions are devoted to the topic of power). However, she is personified only in two comments: "United Russia from power to prison! Down with the Tsar! Freedom of the media!" and "in normal countries, no one ever forbade the collection of dead wood and deadwood. Even in feudal times when it was impossible to hunt even hares in the forest. The State Duma finally came to its senses and canceled the idiotic law, which it adopted. Horray!!!"

A small proportion of respondents compared Russia with other countries (5 %). Many respondents reacted positively to the adoption of amendments to the Forest Code (28.3 %). They considered that the law would help villagers to harvest firewood, and generally noted the advantages of the permissive nature of the document ("It must be a useful law", "I do not live in the village, so I somehow don't need a tree, but my parents will need this law").

We can say that in the absence of a manipulative strategy and tactics that implement it, the main attention of the respondents is directed directly to the adoption of the bill – whether it is necessary or redundant, whether it will have a positive effect on the citizens of Russia. As a result, the opinions of the

participants in the experiment were divided approximately equally between negative and positive attitudes towards the document. At the same time, various reasons for the negative reaction were identified: the redundancy of the law, concerns about the lack of control over forest resources, the ambiguity of amendments – according to commentators, the authorities have no right to restrict citizens in the use of natural resources – and others. The respondents, who had a positive opinion, noted that the document would help rural residents to save money.

To get more objective results, respondents were also asked to comment on the news written by the journalist Lenta.ru. Let us analyze the opinions of survey participants about the primary text posted on the website. Comments will be grouped depending on the reaction to the manipulative tactics that we identified earlier: (Golyanskaya & Melnik, 2019).

Most of the respondents reacted sarcastically to the text, but they rarely paid attention to the power markers. It can be concluded that the tactics of personification, in this case, turned out to be ineffective. The collected material contains sarcastic comments about the Russian authorities (28.3 %). Note that in the opinions of the respondents, much less attention is paid to Vladimir Putin (3.3 %).

The gray world tactics influenced the opinions of the respondents quite strongly. In general, 21.6 % of reactions can be distinguished in which the participants in the experiment distance the Russian government from the people and state structures of other countries. The focus of commentators is not on the separation of power and people, but on the peculiarities of Russia and domestic legislation. At the same time, the opinions of the participants in the experiment differed: some noted the redundancy of the adopted law, others – the injustice of the document and the state world order.

At the same time, comments, the authors of which share the power and the people, can also be observed to a lesser extent (6.7 %). They note that the political elite does not want to make the life of citizens easier and better. The law on the collection of deadwood is perceived as a distraction (“In fact, the state with the richest gas reserves in the world signed up for its unwillingness to share it with the population – why carry out heating when there is deadwood?”). A few reactions (3.3 %), on the contrary, are aimed at uniting the authorities and the people based on a single mentality. Its peculiarity is the respondents' desire to make money, even if by illegal means: “We all know perfectly well the mentality of the Russian people what he wants to do”, “I am sure there will be those who will use these amendments, not for the benefit of the forest and will begin to abuse it.

Besides, 3.3 % of commentators expressed the opinion that it is more important for Russian politicians to supply timber resources to China than for their compatriots: “The Chinese have been able to do it for a long time, but we will only be in 2019,” “No one has bothered me to do this before. they took our forest back from the Chinese and let them collect deadwood”.

Since the respondents did not express negative reactions directly, but with the help of irony and sarcasm, we can conclude that they reacted to the tactics of concealment (“I hope they will be allowed to live until retirement”, “Soon we will also be legally allowed to collect air and breathe, ha-ha”).

When commenting on the news from Lenta.ru, several participants in the experiment reacted to the tactics of overthrowing, namely the use of precedent texts (6.7 %). Commentators, following the author of the news, changed the texts known to any ordinary member of the linguocultural community. Thus, the respondents transformed the famous quote of Saltykov-Shchedrin: “Wake me up in 100 years and ask

what is happening in Russia now, and I will answer you right away – they drink and steal” into “Wake me up in a hundred years, and in Russia, they will still drink and collect deadwood”. The poem of another classic, Nekrasov, was also changed.

“Hey, boy!” – “Walk past yourself!”

- “It's painfully you are formidable, as I can see! Where is the firewood from?”

- “From the forest, obviously, my father, do you hear, collects according to the Amendments in the Forestry Code”, and I take it away))))

In this case, commentators used two well-known texts that have already become memes. In this work, the Internet meme is understood in a broad sense as any unit of cultural information transmitted from person to person in the Internet environment, for example, jokes, videos, etc. (Kanashina, 2019). The reactions of two participants in the experiment acted as memes: “Everyone to collect deadwood until it becomes mainstream!” and (So as not to clean up and allocate money for this.) “Russia is a generous soul”. The first comment makes fun of the law itself, which concerns a small number of people, according to the respondent. In the second, the advertising slogan of the chocolate production company is used, which has already passed into the category of memes. The commentator emphasizes that the authorities adopted the amendments for their benefit, and not for the sake of the country's citizens.

It should be noted that there were also positive reactions to the adoption of the law on the collection of deadwood (25 %). The respondents emphasized that the document can significantly simplify life for rural residents and reduce their expenses for firewood and coal (“Finally, we have adopted something necessary for people”; “This will help to strengthen the fire and sanitary safety of the forest. And solve social problems of people because in the villages not everyone has enough money to buy firewood”; “I have a positive attitude to this law”).

Some of the respondents drew attention to the fact that they learned about the illegality of collecting dead wood only after reading the news (6.7 %). In their opinion, citizens used fallen branches before, and they were not punished (“Good law! Were we outlawed when we gathered branches in nature? I didn't expect this”).

## 7. Conclusion

During the psycholinguistic experiment, it was revealed that the reactions of readers to the text using manipulative strategies and tactics and to the transformed one differ. At the same time, the stage at which the comments of web users and respondents to the news from the site Lenta.ru were studied and compared, allows us to conclude that the difference in reactions is not due to the difference in audiences, but to the text itself.

The differences in reactions to a text using manipulative techniques and a transformed one can be formulated as follows:

1) respondents, unlike Internet users, do not personify power. If there is no mention of any representative of the political elite in the news, the participants in the experiment rely on their knowledge and attitudes on this issue;

2) in the absence of “gray world” tactics, the respondents also touched upon the topic of the people in the news, but the main attention shifted. In the comments of the participants in the experiment, the

people do not seem to be oppressed, on the contrary, some qualities stand out; such as the thirst for profit, the desire to circumvent the law, etc. Moreover, such characteristics, according to the respondents, are inherent in both the people and the authorities, which unites them. In the comments to the text posted on the Web, readers distinguish between the political elite and other Russians;

3) in the comments to the transformed text, there are more diverse opinions on the draft law. It seems that this is due to the absence of manipulative strategies and tactics in the news he proposed: due to the absence of an imposed opinion, respondents need to develop their own, therefore, when commenting, respondents relied mainly on their pre-text attitudes;

5) in general, we can say that the main attention in the comments to the transformed text is directed directly to the topic of news – the adoption of a law on the collection of deadwood, while web users to the news media expressed their opinion about the power and political situation in Russia.

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