

PERAET 2021

International Scientific Conference «PERISHABLE AND ETERNAL: Mythologies and Social Technologies of Digital Civilization-2021»

MYTHOLOGICAL SYMBOLISM AND COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES IN THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE OF JOE BIDEN

Yelena Petrova (a)*, Oksana Bogemova (b)

*Corresponding author

(a) Pskov State University, Pskov, Russian Federation, elenpetrov23@yandex.ru,

(b) Pskov State University, Pskov, Russian Federation, boguemova@mail.ru

Abstract

For thousands of years, humanity has lived in the power of myth and to this day participates in the myth-making process. In its attempt to generalize a person's ideas about the world around him, to make it understandable, convenient, manageable and reasonable, myth assumes the fundamental properties of discourse. Political discourse is no exception, in which the communicants appear as collective, carefully planned mythologized subjects ("power", "voters", "people", etc.). Politicians in their speeches turn to various communicative strategies and manipulations to achieve their political objectives. Political myth aims not only to justify a certain course of events, to ensure the people's faith in the right direction of political actions, but also to create memorable, vivid images of participants in the political process: facts from the life of a politician, the image of state policy in general. This article shows how the myth has become an effective weapon of political rhetoric. This study identifies the main myths of Joseph Biden's political discourse: the myth about the enemy, the myth about the social ideal, the myth about the hero-savior, the myth about the unity with the team. The most frequent lexical units representing the fundamental mythological concepts in the speech of Joseph Biden are described.

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Keywords: Communicative strategies, linguistic tools, myth, political discourse



1. Introduction

Mythology and politics are the most archaic spheres of human activity. “Information management in the modern world is an essential factor in winning and holding power. Ideas can be viewed as a means of planning collective behaviour and politics as an activity requiring such behavior” (Ravochkin, 2019, p. 2658). “It is not only linguists who intuit the power of words, insofar as their interest revolves around language, but so do philosophers, men of letters and all those who find pleasure in reflecting upon words. Politicians gain their power by means of the mass media” (Tănase, 2017, p. 786). Any political force uses the media to maintain and retain power in its hands. The mass media has an extensive layer of verbal and non-verbal means of influencing the views of their audience, among which a certain place is occupied by a political myth as an integral part of political discourse.

Discourse is a linguistic phenomenon that has been introduced relatively recently. In the middle of the 20th century, the concept of discourse was understood as a coherent sequence of sentences or statements. This definition is similar to the concept of text. Later, at the end of the 20th century, the concept of discourse was interpreted by scholars as a complex communicative phenomenon. The concept of discourse, in comparison to the concept of text, includes extralinguistic factors that affect the communication process, and therefore, the concept of discourse is considered within the framework of pragmatics, the branch of linguistics that studies the ways of interaction and influence on the recipient of the statement. “Many researchers emphasize the dynamic properties of discourse. Discourse helps to make a predicative connection between the world and the direct expression of this connection via language” (Zelentsova, 2018, p. 777).

Politics is a power acquired and maintained by instruments provided by the language that is spoken by politicians and the people they address their speech. The language works to express their power, describe their political views, support their political opinions and convince the audience of the necessity of certain political actions (Baghana et al., 2020). “Political communication has broad basic purposes that determine communicative strategies of political discourse” (Novikova, 2018, p. 440). “Political discourse is a reflection of the socio-political life of the country, filled with elements of its culture, general and national-specific cultural values” (Alikaev et al., 2020, p. 49). “Political discourse is aimed at creating positive images and making the audience believe the speaker” (Titova, 2018, p. 437-438). Political rhetoric forms the linguistic image of a politician, which is of particular interest to linguists. It is obvious that politicians producing political discourse implement different strategies to achieve their goals. Turning to the theory of individual mental models we should mention the fact that speakers “have a personal (subjective, possibly ideologically based) representation of the communicative situation” (van Dijk, 2002, p. 211). The main purpose of public speaking is to gain public approval, which may be gained by the use of the relevant language tools.

As a rule, the whole essence of public policy is reduced to the circulation of political symbols, conventional metaphors which act as irreplaceable and effective means of influencing society. Politicians convey some values to the audience by referring to some knowledge common to the society (Liu, 2018). “Since political problems are abstract and sometimes confusing, they are easier to convey through metaphors, which will be understood by everyone” (Denisova & Telesheva, 2018, p. 2).

Before defining a political myth, it is necessary to reveal the general concept of the term "myth". Often, in the ordinary sense, the concept of "myth" (from the Greek - legend) is interpreted as an old one, a naive fairy tale or story about the creation of the world and man (ancient, biblical), as well as whimsically pathos stories about the deeds of legendary Greek or Roman gods and heroes. At the earliest stages of the development of human society, during the formation of tribal relations, the dominant form of worldview was mythology. It was the result of the objective spiritual need of people to explain the structure and mysteries of the universe, the fundamental problems and contradictions of human existence, as well as to interpret various phenomena occurring in nature.

For the mythological consciousness as such, myth is not at all a fairy-tale existence, nor even just a transcendent one. This is the most real and living, the most direct and even sensual being (Losev, 1982). The content of the myth seemed to the people living in the myth, in the highest sense, a real reality and was not a form of real knowledge, but an object of faith.

2. Problem Statement

Being a stereotype of national thinking, the myth becomes a necessary element of political communication and is often an independent tool of political strategists.

Political myths are the main means of supporting, and, most often, praising, the existing political regime and the conditions of social life, justifying the legitimacy of the current government. Political myth is one of the models of mutual understanding and interaction between the participants of the political process, which political leaders and political organizations turn to in search of tools for creating a positive image.

Governments and politicians seek to use symbols for political means. "But to be successful, such symbols must resonate with the populace (or at least part of it), and therefore the most successful appear to be those that have some cultural or historical appeal" (Graeme, 2018, p. 432).

Since myth is a word, anything covered by the discourse can become a myth. What determines a myth is not the subject of its message, but the way in which it is expressed. Myth has formal boundaries, but no substantive ones. "Myth is a system of communication, that it is a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form" (Barthes, 1991, p. 107).

3. Research Questions

3.1 What are the main verbal markers of political discourse?

3.2 How is the Myth objectified in political discourse?

3.3 What mythologems characterize Joe Biden's rhetoric?

4. Purpose of the Study

The research aims to study the symbolic features in Joe Biden's political discourse. The purpose of the paper is also to describe linguistic means that function as mythological markers in the political discourse of Joe Biden.

5. Research Methods

The research material is Joe Biden's first speech as President that he gave on 20 January, 2021 (transcript at Inauguration).

The methodology of the discourse research includes the study of political discourse: its linguistic and paralinguistic features, the identification of intentions, communicative strategies and tactics of the participants of the discourse; the study of semantic features and lexico-grammatical means of the entire discourse.

6. Findings

There are different approaches to categorizing political myths. There are four main types of political myth:

1. The myth of "the enemy" is a socio-political myth that is based on self-interest and on the desire of individual political groups to expand their influence, maintain or seize power.

2. The myth "about the social ideal" or "about the golden age", "the best time" - describes the processes taking place in society in its ideal state. Such a myth is associated either with a certain period of time in the past, when society was good and stable in all respects, or with the future, calling for the realization of the same social ideal, following a certain political model.

3. The myth "about the hero-savior" - is rooted in the most ancient legends, about the existence of a certain hero who will come and solve all the problems of humanity. In the political context, the hero is usually endowed with various charismatic qualities, in legends he is always either a prophet or a skilled warrior, and often even has all the positive features.

4. The myth of "the unity with the team" - is based on the self-identification of society as a unique, as a whole by means of the opposition of social concepts "friends-strangers", "we-they", "us-them". (Balakhonskaya, 2015, pp. 189-194).

The myths are represented in the political discourse through different communicative strategies. Various types of discourse can be characterized as having certain effect on the recipient. The phenomenon of persuasiveness plays a special role in political discourse. Speech influence is understood as any speech communication taken in the aspect of its purposefulness and target conditioning. The concept of speech influence implies creating an effect of influence on the recipient, while the concept of persuasiveness implies changing the recipient's point of view on something or in order to accept the speaker's point of view. The process of persuasive influence is described as an act of persuasive communication, i.e. as a special form of mental and speech activity.

Messages in which the speaker consciously intends to influence the recipient have a persuasive character. It is also necessary to add that a persuasive effect can be exerted both through rational argumentation and through emotional means. Consequently, persistent tactics and strategies can be both rational and emotional.

Political persuasiveness includes evaluative-emotive, advertising components, as well as elements of logical and statistical argumentation. The persuasive potential of political discourse is realized by referring to the political myth as one of the models of mutual understanding and interaction between the

participants of the political process, which political leaders turn to in search of tools for forming a positive image. Myth makes it possible to replace the heavy and truthful picture of reality in the minds of the masses with a symbolic image that allows them to live in harmony with the world.

The main political mythologems used in Joe Biden's first speech as President-elect of the United States.

1. The Myth of the Enemy:

The battle is perennial and victory is never assured. Through Civil War, the Great Depression, World War, 9/11, through struggle, sacrifice and setbacks our better angels have always prevailed. In each of these moments, enough of us, enough of us have come together to carry all of us forward, and we can do that now. (Biden, 2021)

Folks, this is a time of testing. We face an attack on our democracy and untruth. A raging virus, growing inequity, the sting of systemic racism, a climate in crisis, America's role in the world. Any one of these would be enough to challenge us in profound ways. (Biden, 2021)

The myth of the enemy is based on the speech strategy of the conflict. It is represented by means of the following tactics:

- 1) discretization, that is, exposure or insult;
- 2) opposition, which implies a confrontation with another political force, or with the previous government.

In this statement, the president uses discrediting tactics to engage in conflict with alleged enemies. To create an oppositional effect, a lexical juxtaposition technique was used, so that on a mental level, listeners would understand that the new president is contrasting himself with the previous administration. Joe Biden uses the antithesis of "battle-victory", which, objectified in the statement, suggests the president's desire to improve the situation in the country and defend the rights of Americans. Antithesis is one of the most widely used methods of public political speech. Language representation of the antitheses "battle-victory" is realized by certain lexical units (bold fragments in Biden's quotes).

2. The Myth "about the social ideal" or "about the golden age", "the best time»:

*And another January on New Year's Day in 1863, Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. When he put pen to paper, the president said and I quote, "If my name ever goes down into history, it will be for this act, and my whole soul is in it." My whole soul was in it today on this January day, my whole soul is in this. **Bringing America together, uniting our people, uniting our nation, and I ask every American to join me in this cause.*** (Biden, 2021)

Just look around. Here we stand in the shadow of the Capitol Dome as it was mentioned earlier, completed amid the Civil War when the Union itself was literally hanging in the balance. Yet we endured, we prevailed. Here we stand looking out on the great mall where Dr. King spoke of his dream. Here we stand where 108 years ago at another inaugural thousands of protesters tried to block brave women marching for the right to vote. (Biden, 2021)

Joe Biden reconstructed the myth of a better time in his speech relating to the situation with democracy in the country. In his speech, the President refers back to the days of Abraham Lincoln and

Martin Luther King, when significant events took place in the struggle for the civil, ethnic, and economic rights of the American people. J. Biden implies that he has similar problems today, and as the new president, he, like A. Lincoln, will be able to solve all the pressing problems. But he is not alone on this path, and counts on the support of American citizens.

3. The Myth of the "Hero-Savior":

Uniting to fight the foes we face: anger, resentment and hatred, extremism, lawlessness, violence, disease, joblessness, and hopelessness. With unity we can do great things, important things. We can right wrongs. We can put people to work in good jobs. We can teach our children in safe schools. We can overcome the deadly virus. We can reward work and rebuild the middle class and make healthcare secure for all. We can deliver racial justice and we can make America once again, the leading force for good in the world. (Biden, 2021)

Before God and all of you, I give you my word. I will always level with you. I will defend the Constitution. I'll defend our democracy. I'll defend America and will give all, all of you keep everything I do in your service. (Biden, 2021)

Linguistic representation of the myth of the "hero-savior" is realized through the tactics of establishing authority, which implies a demonstration of strength and responsibility for actions, threats, and warnings. The myth of the "hero-savior" includes the myth of "the enemy". A political hero is the effective image of modern political rhetoric. A political figure who is aware of the aspirations and desires of the majority of the population acts as a "hero-savior" of the vulnerable segments of the population. The president's speech is replete with special thematic vocabulary (bold fragments in Biden's quotes). In his speech, J. Biden actively uses personal pronouns (*I, you, we, all*), supports the necessary modality of utterance (*will*), applies the syntactic technique of repetition and parallelism (*I'll, we can, I will defend*).

4. The Myth of "unity with the team":

As we look ahead in our uniquely American way, restless, bold, optimistic, and set our sights on the nation we know we can be, and we must be.

But the American story depends not in any one of us, not on some of us, but on all of us. On we the people who seek a more perfect union. This is a great nation. We are good people. (Biden, 2021)

We can see each other, not as adversaries, but as neighbors. We can treat each other with dignity and respect. We can join forces, stop the shouting and lower the temperature, for without unity there is no peace, only bitterness and fury. No progress, only exhausting outrage. No nation, only a state of chaos. (Biden, 2021)

The president's speech traces two sides that participate in the political discourse:

- 1) "we" – the speaker, "our" – the audience, which must be convinced of the correctness of the statements put forward, to win over to their side;
- 2) "strangers" – the opposition, whose actions are aimed at discrediting the speaker as the politician.

The myth of the "unity with the team" is represented by the strategy of cooperation and consists of the following tactics:

1) integration, which involves equalizing the positions of the speaker and the listeners. The speaker reaches the same level with the recipients of the utterance and tries to convince them that they are on an equal footing;

2) the formation of an emotional mood, which involves the establishment of new or changing the previous views and attitudes of the listeners, inclining them in their own direction.

In his speech, Joe Biden emphasizes the self-identification of American society as a unique and unified whole by contrasting social subjects "our own-others", "we-them".

At the linguistic level, this is represented by the certain vocabulary (bold fragments in Biden's quotes), the president emphasizes the integrity of the American nation by using the pronoun "WE".

Syntactic parallelism (*We can*) contributes to the unfolding of the semantic structure of the myth.

7. Conclusion

In modern politics, the art of speaking to a wide audience plays a significant role. Many of today's politicians are exemplary speakers, and, therefore, the study of their speeches remains an urgent direction in the study of the linguistic portrait of the speaker and in identifying deep mythological meanings.

It can be concluded that Joe Biden uses a complex of thematically related myths that are basic for political discourse and are implemented using stable semantic models, certain vocabulary, and the use of stylistic and syntactic techniques.

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