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"Journalistic text in a new technological environment:
achievements and problems"

**DISCREDITING STRATEGY IN THE FIDEL CASTRO'S MEDIA
DISCOURSE**

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Abstract

The article is aimed at the study the discrediting communicative strategy and its tactics on the material of Fidel Castro's *Reflexions*. A systematic analysis of his articles in the period from 2007 to 2014 has been provided for the research. Given the high degree of the presence of ideologically marked views in Fidel Castro's media discourse, one of the main functions of his column is the struggle for political interests. In an open information space, following the rest of the Cuban media, he needs to defend his point of view. The article studies the discrediting strategy as one of the basic communicative strategies in the Fidel Castro's media discourse and touches upon the problem of nature and peculiarities in realization of a speech strategy aimed at undermining the authority of his political opposition. The discrediting strategy is understood in the study as a strategy aimed at the positive image destruction of the political opponent and his beliefs in the eyes of the target audience. Among the techniques actively used by the politician there are such linguistic and stylistic means as a ridicule, direct accusation, opposition, metaphor, labeling. These means are supposed to influence the shaping of the mass audience's negative opinion about the capitalist system in general, and its characteristics in particular. The conclusions of this article may result in further academic research. Therefore, the comparative analysis of speech strategies and tactics in modern democratic and totalitarian states given there can be perspective of this study.

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Keywords: Political media discourse, discrediting strategy, Fidel Castro column.



1. Introduction

Political communication has acquired special importance for modern society due to its widespread presence in our life. News distribution technical means are nowadays so available and easy to use that it is difficult to imagine a person who would not be able to have current information about the events taking place on the political scene. Thus, modern media provide political figures with the opportunity to participate directly and continuously in the struggle for their audience.

The struggle for power, its preservation and retention characterize the main goal of political discourse, the interest in which is manifested by a number of Sciences: political science, sociology, social psychology, and linguistics. The features of this type of discourse conditioned the emergence of a special discipline named political linguistics, which deals with the study of mechanisms of political communication, responding to the growing interest of society to this problem.

The integration of political discourse the media as the most widespread discourses of our time causes great interest to researchers.

The political media discourse is considered as a comprehensive communicative phenomenon, the purpose of which is the struggle for power by making the public think one way or another. This discourse type includes text as a verbalized result of speech, context, as well as special language tools that meet the goals and objectives of discourse.

The influence is sometimes not fully realized by the manipulator himself (Savelieva, 2015), so the necessity to manipulate the opinion of the audience to some extent makes politicians and journalists consciously or unconsciously to make use of speech strategies and tactics. The studies on the manipulative potential of discourse have contributed to the development of classifications of speech strategies and tactics that can be used as an applied tool for mastering the ways of influencing the public.

2. Problem Statement

Journalism in a totalitarian state exists and develops in special conditions (Kecskemeti, 1950). Information policy is regulated from the top. The media cannot influence political activity in the country. In such a system, people do not have personal access to a wide range of information. There is an imbalance between public and private life, with its wide implications is built on both the ideology and the policy of the totalitarian states. Intervention in private life in order to enforce it in the realization of its goals and define it politically (Barhaim, 2017).

However, in the case where the flow of information cannot be limited, the Institute of journalism is forced to develop special ways to oppose the points of view that are contrary to the officially accepted ideology.

For a long time, the Cuban authorities have been able to restrain the flow of information by restricting access to the Internet or even preventing its technical dissemination. Despite the prohibitions on the use of certain radio waves and television channels, Cuban residents were able to illegally install antennas and connect to the desired channels.

Currently, the media system in Cuba has transformed itself and has various channels of communication (Moragues González, 2012).

In order to compete with foreign media, which do not always support the official Cuban ideology, Cuban media have to defend constantly their ideas.

In this study, on the example of the journalistic experience of Fidel Castro, it is proposed to consider the features of the functioning of the discrediting strategy.

3. Research Questions

The methods of conducting anticapitalist polemic with the media that enter the Cuban information space have been developed by the Cuban media. Among them, there is a deep analysis of events and facts, historical analysis, comparative analysis of significant social phenomena.

All the above-mentioned reasoning methods are present in list of Fidel Castro's column Reflections. The former leader of the Cuban socialist revolution at the time of his articles publication had hardly appeared in public and had no opportunity to make a speech. The only way to fight an unfriendly ideology was to work with a column that expressed his subjective opinion.

Keeping in mind the high degree of ideological semantic load of the publications, and their pragmatic aiming at the reader, we can explain the presence of manipulative strategies. In this study, we propose to examine one of these strategies, the discrediting strategy, to which the author actively resorts in an effort to create negative image for his political opponents.

Communicative strategies are strategies used by a person to overcome critical moments that occur when language constructions are not enough to convey a person's thoughts (Vinnik & Grushevskaya, 2017).

Communicative strategy is a common task that is performed with specific steps.

The main questions of this study are to: a) define and decode techniques and tactics through which the discrediting strategy is implemented, b) examine the object of discrediting, c) identify the reasons that allow Fidel Castro to make use of discrediting strategy, d) identify linguistic and stylistic means by which tactics and means are presented.

4. Purpose of the Study

In the context of modern realities, the high emotional charge and effectiveness of media texts in terms of impact on the audience make the authors neglect the principles of truth and fact in favor of strengthening the influencing force of their negative assessments (Fedorova, Saburova, & Nikolaeva, 2016).

The purpose of this article is to analyze discrediting strategy as a manipulative strategy aimed at transmitting negative opinion about the opponent to the reader. It is also designed to examine the features of its functioning in the discourse of Fidel Castro, based on the main objectives of this strategy and to determine the communicative potential of the discrediting strategy in Fidel Castro's journalism.

This article may also provide a perspective on study relationships between Cuban political discourse and the media.

5. Research Methods

As a material for the study of the discursive features of the journalistic activity of Fidel Castro, the articles of Fidel Castro in the newspaper *Granma* were taken as a material for the study of the discursive features of the journalistic activity of this politician. The articles refer to the period from 2007 to 2014.

The material is investigated by the methods of continuous sampling and contextual analysis.

Based on the definition of the discrediting strategy, sampling of stylistic and linguistic means was made to meet the fundamental function of discrediting strategy that is to undermine the authority of hostile ideology as well as its followers and attributes.

The examples for each category given in italics are in Spanish in order to keep all the original language nuances. As a material for the study of the discursive features of the journalistic activity of Fidel Castro, the articles of Fidel Castro in the newspaper *Granma* were taken as a material for the study of the discursive features of the journalistic activity of this politician. The articles refer to the period from 2007 to 2014.

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6. Findings

Events, processes and situations are traditionally the subject of reflection in journalism. In most cases, Fidel Castro's Reflections refer to current events in the sphere of politics and economics. A personal meeting, a speech of a political leader, a sport event, a publication of an official economic report, a natural disaster, military actions, dates which make the author remember the past, may serve as an information impetus for writing an article.

Fidel Castro's column is a personal opinion expression of the politician on the above-mentioned issues.

In order to make statements look reasonable, and conclusions well grounded, Fidel Castro always relies on particular sources, statements of particular people, referring to accurate data, names and authors.

In the process of political communication, a politician may have different goals, such as: 1) to convince the audience to and accept certain point of view; 2) to gain authority; 3) to encourage voting for a certain candidate; 4) to diminish the achievements of the opponent. Based on the above-mentioned goals, there are several main strategies to perform in the communication: self-presentation strategy, self-defense strategy, discredit strategy, manipulative strategy, persuasion strategy (Kryachkova, 2015).

One of the most considerable strategies existing in the pragmatic field of Fidel Castro's discourse is discrediting strategy. This strategy is very effective in the fight against ideologically opposing points of view, because its essence lies in undermining confidence in someone or something, diminishing the

authority and importance of someone or something (Karyakin, 2009), and therefore the elevation of the author's position.

The very concept of "strategy" was taken by linguistics from military science for the analysis of modern political communication. (Bondarenko, 2014). According to the typology proposed by Issers (2008), the discrediting strategy refers to the group of basic speech strategies as the most significant from the point of view of the hierarchy of motives and goals.

The author uses all possible means to undermine the reader's trust in his ideological opponent. In this study, we propose to consider the following methods of implementation of discrediting strategy.

6.1. Direct accusation

The tactics of accusation is carried out in attributing guilt to someone. The author should exercise extreme caution in choosing the means for this tactic not to cross the border of accusation and insult, which can be considered by the audience as a humiliation of the dignity of a person. Insults cause negative public feedback and rejection of the speaker's point of view. Argumentative potential of this tactic, in such a case, is significantly reduced.

Accusation of the opponents in political leaders' discourse is usually realized by unmasking other political figures or activities (Issers, 2008).

The tactics of accusation can be realized in the speech of politicians through sarcasm and comparison of the opponent with the object whose features the speaker wants to emphasize.

Fidel Castro openly and quite categorically speaks about his opponents. For example, he can afford to call the United States authorities hypocrites *hipócritas*. Similarly, he speaks of their diplomacy. He calls the former President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili an adventurer with a strange history *un aventurero de extraña historia*.

It is impossible not to note that Fidel Castro most often employs the tactics of direct accusation and harsh criticism in relation to the former President of the United States George W. Bush, calling him a true representative of the terror system *el más genuino representante de un sistema de terror*.

6.2. Labeling

Emotionally and stylistically marked words and expressions may be used in the function of influence. In contrast to the neutral vocabulary, their connotative meaning may contain either positive or negative characteristic (Navasartian, 2016).

Emotionally and stylistically marked units that express negative evaluation, contempt, neglect or disapproval participate in the formation of speech labels in the discrediting strategy. Systematic repetition of a word or phrase, with negative evaluative meanings allows the author to assign to the object of discredit his subjective characteristic and introduce it into the consciousness of the audience.

The label, represented by the emotionally-marked *yanqui* lexeme, appears in the form of a noun or an adjective. In the first case, the word acts as a direct negative nomination, which refers to people, and in the second case, it plays an attributing function. This allows to mark objects of any kind selected by the author.

A Yankee is a person from a northern or north-eastern state of the United States. At the same time, the definition of *yanqui* implies the existence of pejorative values that could cause insult to the opponent.

Denotative meaning of the *yanqui* lexeme in Spanish is represented by its synonyms with neutral emotional evaluation *estadounidense* and *norteamericano*. The formation of a pejorative characteristic, inherent in the lexeme today, has evolved over decades of Cuban and American cultures interaction.

The negative connotation of the lexeme in Fidel Castro's articles may be revealed by analyzing its context.

- words and expressions containing notions of hostile ideology (*el imperialismo yanqui*, *el gobierno proyanqui de Batista*)
- words denoting military realities that may pose a threat to Cuba (*las tropas yanquis*, *las fuerzas armadas yanquis*, *los aviones sin piloto yanquis*, *base aérea yanqui*, *bombas yanquis*)
- words naming the commercial values of a hostile ideology (*las grandes transnacionales yanquis*, *bancos yanquis*, *los millonarios yanquis*)
- words with negative connotation (*chantaje*, *los invasores*, *las agresiones*, *las amenazas*, *la invasión*, *el brutal asesinato*) are more likely to be accompanied by *yanqui*.

Using such a method we can classify the thematic fields of use of the neutral *norteamericano* into several groups:

- words meaning people who the author respects (*el cineasta norteamericano Oliver Stone*, *Robert Woodward es un periodista y escritor norteamericanos*, *El valiente y brillante cineasta norteamericano Michael Moore*)
- words denoting persons, social groups, which, according to the author, are not involved in the hostile imperialist ideology (*las victorias de los magníficos atletas norteamericanos*; *los niños norteamericanos*).

6.3. Ridicule

Discrediting strategy of a political figure authority or an organization is articulated through the tactics of ridicule, which involves irony and sarcasm.

For example, Fidel Castro ridicules the bourgeois lifestyle of American politicians, deliberately exaggerating the danger of choking on a fish bone *el riesgo de muerte*, which can expect them at breakfast on a luxury yacht. He ironically magnifies the danger so much that he calls such politicians brave *los supervalientes* and offers to encourage them with the Nobel prize.

Among the techniques that characterize Fidel Castro's individual discrediting strategy style, there should be noted antiphrasis - a figure in which a phrase or word is used in a way that is opposite to its literal meaning. The comic effect of such a figure is achieved when interacting with the context.

In the article *El mundo maravilloso del capitalismo* (Castro, 2014), the author implements the tactics of ridicule, and uses antiphrasis in the headline, the opposite meaning of which is opened to the reader in the process of reading the text of the article. After reading the article, it becomes clear that capitalism is really wonderful just for Arab sheikhs, heads of large corporations and highly paid football players. Ordinary people under such a system are beaten or poisoned with poisonous gases.

6.4. Rhetorical interrogation

The interrogative construction in rhetorical form concludes the statement or denial of something in the form of questions, but does not answer them (Turlacu, 2014). Such a figure of speech enhances the expressiveness of speech, allows the speaker to demonstrate his emotional state.

By asking a rhetorical question, the speaker does not express his point of view in such an explicit form to seem imperative.

The accumulation of rhetorical interrogations in Fidel Castro's discourse forms a special syntactic area united by one topic, as it is observed in the following example, by freedom of the press.

¿Lo sabían nuestros lectores? ¿Algún órgano importante de la prensa hablada o escrita dijeron una palabra? ¿Es esa la libertad de prensa...?

The conclusion, to which the author leads his reader, is in the last sentence. The fact that the Western press is not free follows from the fact that readers do not know about the event, because nothing was said about it in the press.

In addition, rhetorical questions have an evaluative function and convey the emotional tension of the author.

In Spanish, the demonstrative pronoun *ese* can be used in a derogatory sense, and in this case Fidel Castro thus clearly shows his negative attitude towards the Western press. In his opinion, it distorts the concept of freedom of the press by not informing the readers about the most important events.

6.5. Opposition

In the opposition, the elements are as distanced from each other as possible. Such methods of discrediting strategy as antithesis, contextual antonymy and conceptual opposition are formed on the basis of the principle of contrast in Fidel Castro's column. The categorical nature of the author's assessments determines the absence of gradation within such dichotomous models as "good\bad".

In a broad sense, conceptual opposition can be understood as a binary opposition of concepts that are in opposition to each other.

One of the key conceptual oppositions of Fidel Castro's ideological worldview is the "Revolution-Empire" dichotomy. The revolution, by which the Cuban socialist revolution is understood, is always positively evaluated in the discourse of politics, and the Empire, which is marked on its political map with the United States, on the contrary, is seen only negatively. Against the background of praising the achievements of the Revolution, the crimes of the Empire should make a terrible impression on the reader.

Stylistically and emotionally colored headlines, which are based on the antithesis, perform a rhetorical function of attracting the reader's attention. Such headings play an important compositional role and represent an important element for the text, they set the tone for the whole article and from the very beginning they involve the reader in the sphere of author's interests and his emotional state. For example, *Lo verdadero y lo falso, Los vicios y las virtudes, La verdad y las diatribes, Los vivos y los muertos*.

Contrast plays a significant role in the process of forming and structuring the reader's ideological views about the world through the formation of a system of conceptual oppositions.

6.6. Metaphor

From the point of view of modern cognitive science, metaphor is considered to be the main mental operation, a way of cognition, a way of structuring evaluation and explanation of the world. The speaker, using a metaphor in his speech, invites the audience to his world and becomes closer to the people he is open to him.

The sphere of the source for the formation of metaphors in the discourse of Fidel Castro is often the force of nature, which is associated with such qualities as unexpectedness, uncontrollability, cruelty.

- *un mar de mentiras y calumnias*
- *lluvia de proyectiles nucleares exterminadores y precisos*

In the article named *Dos terremotos*, Fidel Castro describes two events: the earthquake in Japan and the political unrest in Libya, which he also calls an earthquake. As well as the consequences of a natural disaster, political activity can lead to terrible and irreparable consequences.

Extended metaphor allows the reader to form an idea about the way the opponent act. In the article *Dos Lobos hambrientos y una Roja Caperucita*, (Castro, 2014) the politician creates a vivid image of Europe and the United States, dressed in the kind grandmothers, for which there are no obstacles and forbidden means to achieve their desired objectives.

The article *El zarpazo al acecho* (Castro, 2014) talks about the adoption of a resolution on sanctions against Iran, which, as Fidel Castro emphasizes, insist the United States and Israel. Despite the persistence of the representatives of these countries and their arguments revealing violations of the principles of the Treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons by Iran, such countries as Turkey and Brazil from the UN Security Council consider a peaceful dialogue to be much more effective. Fidel Castro compares the readiness of the United States and Israel to impose sanctions with waiting in the hideout *el acecho* for the time they can attack *el zarpazo* by pulling the trigger *apretar el gatillo*.

Anthropomorphic metaphor attributes features, which are supposed to be inherent in human, to inanimate objects, natural disasters, political parties, ideological systems etc. The image of capitalism is discredited with this type of metaphor. The author gives it the ability to kill poor people: *practicar una masiva eutanasia de los pobres* (Castro, 2014).

Zoomorphic metaphors play an important role in the implementation of the discrediting strategy, with the help of which the reader forms vivid and memorable images associated with certain characteristics of wildlife.

For example, a bird of prey NATO *ave de rapiña empollada en las faldas del imperio yanki* or George Bush presented as an aggressive fighting Miura bull *este pequeño miura moral*.

7. Conclusion

The discrediting strategy, as one of the most effective in the political discourse of the media, is presented in the discourse of Fidel Castro. The choice of this strategy is reasoned by the desire of the politician to undermine public confidence in his opponents.

The reason for discrediting the authority and importance of a politician or a whole political system in most cases is insincerity, corruption, the pursuit of profit, aggression against the weak, double standards.

Among the methods of implementation of the discrediting strategy identified by the study there are:

- Direct accusation
- Labeling
- Tactic
- Rhetorical interrogation
- Opposition
- Metaphor

Using tactics of discrediting strategy Castro structures the picture of the world of his reader, forms the values of his audience.

The role of the percussive function is particularly evident in the columns of political orientation. The close connection with political activity, and, moreover, the direct involvement of columnists in politics, in some cases, makes theorists wonder whether the column is a pure genre of journalism (Barriga, 2014).

Fidel Castro's publications are an interesting and unique phenomenon, the study of which will contribute to the further understanding of the integration of political discourse and columnism. Identifying features of the genre, combining the author's publications, is of importance for the theoretical description of the column genre.

The study of the discrediting strategy through the prism of the diachronic approach is also of interest. Predominance of different types of discrediting strategy in certain periods of society development is a result of changes in the criterion of admissibility or inadmissibility of certain means and tactics of discrediting (Shiryayeva, Chernousova, & Trius, 2016). The comparative analysis of speech strategies and tactics in modern democratic and totalitarian states given there can be perspective of this study.

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