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DYSPHEMIZATION IN THE PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT

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Abstract

The article introduces a comprehensive analysis of dysphemism in the professional discourse of the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation D. A. Medvedev. This work was based on the principles of linguistics of political personality, or linguistic personology. The study featured interviews made in 2013-2019 and included elements of contextual, functional, and pragmatic analysis of political texts. The analysis revealed a set of functions of dysphemisms in the professional discourse, including some new ones. The list of functions involved: 1) explicating a negative attitude to certain events or actions; 2) detabooing an open discussion of several economic and political topics as opposed to deliberate political correctness of the Western media, e.g. the situation in the Middle East, migration, sanctions, etc.; 3) adapting the sender to the characteristics of the professional communication of the recipient; 4) leveling the atmosphere of a “solemn meeting”; 5) linguistic economy. A part-of-speech analysis of the dysphemisms showed the predominance of nouns and indefinite pronouns, such as “какой-то” (some), “где-то там” (somewhere there), “кое-где” (in some places), “кое-кто” (somebody), “такие-сякие” (so and so), “всякий” (certain) that served to enhance the negative characteristic of the described object or situation. In his unprepared speech, D.A.Medvedev appeared to use dysphemisms coined by others while indicating their authorship or source.

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1. Introduction

The pragmatic potential of political discourse has long been in the focus of history, politics, linguistics, and cultural studies. Each historical period concentrated on its own aspect of the pragmatic potential of political discourse, thus building up the conceptual and methodological basis for the theory of mass manipulation. The past five years has seen an increase in scientific interest in the study of euphemization and dysphemization of political discourse (Borovchenko, 2018; Bravkova & Onal, 2018; Konareva, 2017; Kosareva, & Pastukhova, 2019; Lysyakova & Gaevaia, 2018; Orlova, 2018). Euphemization and dysphemization are both effective tools that allow politicians to manipulate the public perception and evaluation of various political events, figures, and organizations. The ever-growing scale of audience coverage makes the study of these methods of mass manipulation even more relevant. In the world of global internet, it is important to study tools that allow their users to manipulate mass consciousness. The dysphemization studies raise issues related to the evaluativity of discourse in general and its types, e.g. political discourse.

2. Problem Statement

A review of contemporary dysphemism studies revealed certain gaps in what regards the functions of dysphemisms in political discourse, pragmatic potential of dysphemisms in the speech of individual politicians, and tools of responsibility avoidance by using dysphemisms in political discourse. The analyzed publications could be limited to the following list of functions: 1) discrediting a political opponent, 2) adding emotional expressiveness to the statement, 3) explicating verbal aggression, 4) exerting populism in election discourse, 5) delegitimizing the actions of political opponents, be it individual politicians or whole countries (Gladkova, 2017; Golubeva, 2017; Mugair, 2014; Pastuhova, 2014; Ryabtseva, 2017; Shapochkin, 2015; Sokolova, 2014; Usmonov, 2017; Zvada, 2018, etc.) The fact that dysphemization still remains understudied by linguistic personology (Crespo-Fernandez, 2013; Golubeva, 2017; Yusuf, 2003) significantly limits scientific knowledge about the role of the world's political leaders in the formation of the so-called global system of attitudes to political events and personalities. In addition, the role of dysphemisms in avoiding political responsibility has also been poorly researched.

3. Research Questions

The present research was based on the following hypothesis: dysphemisms in political discourse are not only an effective means of mass consciousness manipulation, but also an effective tool that helps to solve various political issues.

To verify the hypothesis, we analyzed a set of interviews that the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation D. A. Medvedev gave in 2013–2019. The choice of the politician was due to the fact that D. A. Medvedev is known for his prolific online communication. All the interviews were obtained from the official site of Russian government <http://government.ru/>.

4. Purpose of the Study

The research objective was to study dysphemisms in D.A. Medvedev's discourse as an effective tool of mass consciousness manipulation, as well as discussing and resolving political issues.

5. Research Methods

Conceptually, this study was based on the theoretical principles of the linguistic personology within the framework of political communication. If applied to the professional discourse of political leaders, this theory makes it possible to identify discursive ways of explicating a system of evaluative coordinates that affects the perception and interpretation of political events, phenomena, figures, and organizations by domestic and foreign recipients. In this work, the domestic recipients of political discourse are citizens and politicians of this country, while foreign recipients are citizens and political figures of other states.

Methodologically, the present research used the concepts and methods of linguistics and political linguistic personology, including elements of contextual, functional, and pragmatic analyses of political texts. The methods of content analysis and intent analysis were the main research methods.

The analysis included the following stages 1) selection of dysphemisms from D. A. Medvedev's political discourse; 2) classification of the dysphemisms based on the part of speech; 3) establishment and analysis of the functions the dysphemisms play in the professional discourse; 4); revealing the characteristic features of the dysphemization of the political discourse in question.

6. Findings

6.1. Part-of-speech analysis

The part-of-speech analysis revealed that the prevailing amount of dysphemisms was expressed by nouns, 100% of which were common nouns. No anthroponyms were identified, in spite of the fact that they are a popular way to discredit individuals or groups of people. Verbs and adjectives were represented almost equally in a quantitative ratio. D.A. Medvedev's use of dysphemisms was peculiar in the number of is the indefinite pronouns he uses to strengthen his negative attribute, e.g. "какой-то" (some), "где-то там" (somewhere there), "кое-где" (in some places), "кое-кто" (somebody), "такие-сякие" (so and so), "всякий" (certain), etc.

6.2. Functional potential of dysphemisms

A study of the functions of dysphemisms in D. A. Medvedev's professional discourse made it possible to identify the specifics of their functional potential and revealed some previously unstudied functions of dysphemisms in political discourse.

6.2.1. Adapting to the recipient and negative evaluation

Some functions prove to overlap. For instance, the function of adapting the speech of the sender to the communicative features of the recipient often accompanied the function of negative evaluation of particular social, political, and economic events and political actions. D. A. Medvedev uses highly

expressive figurative and colloquial expressions to show the recipient, i.e. a common citizen, that he speaks the language of ordinary people and is as resentful of low salaries, red tape, and negligence as ordinary Russians. The list includes such words and phrases as *крутиться* (revolve), *разогрев* (warm-up), *вылететь наверх* (fly up), *плодиться* (breed), *сжаться* (crouch), *рухнуть* (cash down), *дутый* (phoney), *сдернуть* (drag down), *скрипеть* (sreech), *перекос* (sag), *отщипывать* (chip off), *вставлять палки в колеса* (throw a monkey-wrench into the machinery), *нестись под откос* (rush down the slope), *пустить под откос* (send into a tailspin), *обвалиться* (crash down), *уйти в свисток* (put all strength into the whistle), *продавить* (push through), *спеленать по рукам и ногам* (swaddle one by one's arms and legs), *подвесить* (hang up), *подвиснуть* (be in a hang state), *черная дыра* (black hole), *покусывать* (give a bite), *обложить со всех сторон* (beset from all sides), *порвать в клочья* (tear to shreds), *бить по рукам* (slap on the wrist), *отжать* (grab hold of), *липовый* (bogus), *заволынить* (dawdle over), *ударить по карману* (hit one's pocket), *больше ни копейки* (not a kopeck more), *гроши* (chickenfeed), *дармовой* (free of charge).

In order to adapt to the communicative features of the recipient and find a common language with the audience, D. A. Medvedev uses colloquial vocabulary popular in certain social circles. So, for example, while talking to students, he uses words and expressions that students might use when talking to each other, e.g. *курсовик* (term paper), *поляна* (domain), *унылый вуз* (a dismal third-rate university), *чушь собачья* (dog's breakfast). However, the number of such words is minimal.

To activate the function of negative evaluation of certain events or actions, D. A. Medvedev resorts to a number of linguistic means. First of all, these are words with a pronounced negative connotation that he uses to express his negative attitude to the behavior of a group of people when describing both domestic and international situations. This can be a negative characteristic of one's speech (*обывательские разговорчики* (laymen talking), *говорить через губу* (speak through one's lip, in an arrogant manner), a negative characteristic of a person, e.g. *жулики* (swindlers), *проходимцы* (rascals), *карьеристы* (social climbers), *взяточники* (bribe takers), a negative characteristic of one's behavior, e.g. *хамство просто* (simple boorishness), *вести себя по-хамски* (behave in a boorish way), a negative characteristic of the situation as a whole, e.g. *кампанейщина* (stop-and-go manner), *борьба с ведьмами и колдунами* (witch hunting), *безобразие* (disgrace), *компот* (hotchpotch), *чушь (всякая / какая-то / собачья)* (some / kind of / dog's bullshit), *ерунда* (rubbish), *крамола* (blue talk), as well as a negative characteristic of the tool that was used to create the undesirable situation, e.g. *дурацкие поделки* (stupid craft), *бумажки* (silly papers), *муть* (slobber). Most frequently, he resorts to “чушь” (bullshit).

6.2.2. Leveling the atmosphere of a “solemn meeting” and linguistic economy

The functions of leveling the atmosphere of a “solemn meeting” and linguistic economy appeared to be intertwined. These functions involve the use of professionalisms and colloquial expressions, e.g. *социалка* (social security), *первичка* (primary construction fund), *капремонт* (structural repairs), *«цифра»* (digital), *бумажки* (papers), *глубинка* (far provinces), *труба* (gas pipe), *нитка* (gas pipe), *«пятерка»* (five), *«шестерка»* (six), *«восьмерка»* (eight), *«двадцатка»* (twenty), *бюджетники* (state employees), *киношники* (film makers), *вдолгую* (long term), etc. Obviously, such lexemes are effective time-savers, e.g. “социалка” instead of the phrase “social security system”, or “первичка” instead of

“primary construction fund”, or “six” instead of “the group of leaders of six countries’s that try to resolve the situation in the east of Ukraine”.

The function of leveling the atmosphere of a “solemn meeting” is successfully realized through the use of colloquialisms and professional slang that remind the communicants that, despite the highest level of the meeting, the communication style should be businesslike. For instance, such words as “*капремонт*” (structural repairs) or “*первичка*” (primary construction fund) not only contribute to language economy, but also help to show the recipient that the meeting is actually aimed at solving some pressing issues related to housing and construction.

6.2.3. Detabooing public discussion

Expressive words and phrases with negative connotation help to detaboo certain economic and political topics. It seems that this is done to contrast the deliberate political correctness of Western political and media discourse. In addition, this function is closely connected with the function of negative evaluation. This function is used in detabooing the following issues:

1) **The Ukraine situation** is described with the help of the following dysphemisms: *хамская позиция* (boorish position), *свинство* (piggishness), *жулики* (swindlers), *чушь собачья* (dog’s breakfast), *наглая циничная ложь* (bald cynic lie), *просто хамство* (simple boorishness), *хаос* (chaos), *анархия* (anarchy).

2) **The doping scandal**: Then a completely unacceptable, immoral, in my opinion, decision was made to ban the Paralympists. It's simply beyond good and evil (Interview to five channels, 12/15/16).

3) **The military conflict in Georgia in 2008**. To make his attitude explicit, the politician resorts to such expressive dysphemisms as “*безответственное, аморальное, преступное поведение* (irresponsible, immoral, criminal behavior); *безобразное решение о нападении на стариков и детей* (disgraceful decision to attack old people and children), *крайне русофобская позиция* (extremely Russia-phobic position), *абсолютно безответственная позиция*” (absolutely irresponsible position).

4) **The migration wave in Europe and the situation in the Middle East**: Therefore, it will be recognized that the only way and the only form of government in the Middle East is the model a la ISIS, that is, when some people just chop off other people’s heads, as if other means were inefficient, they collect tribute, thus returning everyone to, so to say, the 7th century AD (Interview to the Time magazine, 02/15/16). To express his attitude to the situation in the Middle East, the politician resorts to the following dysphemisms: *зомбированные / патентованные убийцы* (zombified / certified killers), *отъявленные негодяи* (scoundrels of the deepest dye), *хаос* (chaos), *бандиты* (bandits), *пособники* (sidekicks), *уроды* (degenerates), *промывка мозгов* (brainwashing), etc.

5) **The anti-Russian sanctions initiated by the USA**: If somebody shows us the door, then we will go to some other door (Interview with ITAR-TASS News Agency, September 19, 2014).

6) **US actions in international conflicts**. The actions of the American government are described with the help of especially expressive dysphemisms, e.g. But then the “Arab spring” happened, and the fate of the unfortunate Mubarak was sad, because our American “friends”, whom he had served faithfully for decades, were simply turned him in, and as a result brought extremists to power (Interview to the Handelsblatt, 02/11/16); They feel uncomfortable to oppose Americans, and the latter are getting more and

more sharp-elbowed in this sense (Russian-Finnish negotiations, 01/29/16); c) We keep asking our American partners about their use of armed forces in attacking hospitals, mourning processions, and schools. For some reason, this doesn't bother them very much (Interview with the Second Israeli Channel, 11/05/16).

When talking about the Ukrainian authorities, D. Medvedev emphasizes that they are perfectly aware of what they are doing. However, when describing the actions of American politicians, he activated the motive of insanity: But other countries should think: If somewhere some other another government gets all itchy in some other place, what will happen to the interests of the people who use these (food) cards? (Interview to Rossiya TV Channel, 24/05/14); I hope that our Western partners do not want that and there are no lunatics among their decision makers (Interview to the Vedomosti newspaper, 8/09/14); I don't even want to comment on it, it's sad, it's some kind of aberration in the brain (Interview to CNBC, 10/15/14); The United States of America, as a rule, conducts two or three military campaigns and never sees their problems, but they try to shift these problems from a sore point to a healthy one (lit. from a sick head to a healthy one (Interview to the Second Israeli Channel, 11/5/16); As for the sanctions themselves, this latest outburst, which happened just recently, is another such schizoid story related to the elite consolidation in America (Interview to the NTV Channel, 02/17/19); Honestly, this is some kind of nonsense, even paranoid nonsense, I would say: to suspect someone of an event that has not yet happened. Let them show some evidence after the elections take place (Press conference with the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, 03/03/19).

6.3. Authorship and sources of dysphemisms

The analysis revealed that D.A. Medvedev uses both authentic dysphemisms and those coined by other people. When D.A. Medvedev uses a word or expression that does not correspond with the official style, he often indicates its source.

In this aspect, dysphemisms are used:

1) **in direct citation:** Unfortunately, our Western colleagues can't get used to it, and instead of building relations with Russia as an equal partner, with its geopolitical and economic interests of a large state, they try to make it look like such a "second-rate country" or, at best, a "regional power" (Interview with the international agency Sputnik, 02/12/16); As far as I remember, a few days ago President Putin rightfully said that America is no banana republic that one can put press it and say: this or that man will be your president... (Interview with Israel's Second TV Channel, 11/5/16), There is such a Russian proverb: "Cut your coat according to your cloth." In other words, it is impossible to plan some kind of rapid development if there are no macroeconomic conditions for it (Interview to five TV channels, 12/15/16);

2) **when imitating citation of someone else's speech:** But, of course, if there is information, law enforcement agencies and control authorities are obliged to analyze it and are obliged to make decisions, but only within the framework of existing procedures, and not based on emotional considerations, not like "Wow, look who made the headlines! Come on, let's roll everyone into the asphalt", but based on the specific materials of the case and the legal assessment of its essence (Interview to five TV channels, 12/09/15);

3) with the help of direct speech markers "говорят" (they say), "как было сказано" (as it was

said), “как у нас принято говорить” (as it is customary to say here), “что называется” (as it is called): They say: you helped the banks, but the banks are so and so, they have a lot of money and everything else. But if banks rush into the abyss, if they fall apart, then the whole economy stops (Interview to five TV channels, 12/9/15); This, as it was said in one Soviet film, is laymen talking, because in fact one can be cut off from anything (Interview to five TV channels, 12/9/15); And if the state decides to split into two parts, what are we to do in this case, should we send for the guarantors and say: “Listen, they decided to split up, now you have to use force, because they made stupid decisions here, and you signed them?” (Interview to the TV channel "Russia", 05/24/14); We were ready to construct it, we made a lot of preparations, even spent quite considerable money this all, we were ready to start the construction on the sea bottom, but Brussels officials said that they couldn't coordinate it, in fact, they dragged it on, dawdled it, as it is customary to say here (Interview to RTV Slovenia, 07/24/15); I think that the right-wing parties really have the opportunity to get back what's their own, as it is called (Interview to the Time magazine, 02/15/16); But, unfortunately, because of what happened in Ukraine and the efforts of the Obama administration, these relations fell, as they say, in the toilet, and they became very low (Interview to Israel's Second TV Channel, 11/05/16).

When the politician uses dysphemisms coined by other people and explicates their authorship or source, it allows him to relieve himself of responsibility for their use in public discourse.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of the dysphemism in the professional discourse of the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation D. A. Medvedev showed that dysphemisms in the professional discourse of an experienced politician can be an effective political tool. On the one hand, they make it possible to unequivocally express one's negative attitude to the actions of individual politicians or political associations. On the other hand, dysphemisms contribute to solving important political problems. In this sense, we managed to identify the following functions: detabooing public discussion of relevant economic and political topics; adapting the speech to the communication features of the recipient; leveling the atmosphere of a “solemn meeting”; linguistic economy. Some of these functions proved to be novel in scientific literature.

The research also owes its significance to the identification of the authorship and sources of dysphemization used in D.A. Medvedev's speech.

A comprehensive study of dysphemization in the political discourse of political leaders can be an important step in the development of political linguistic personology. In the future, this can help model a global system of attitudes to important political phenomena, which can reveal similarities and differences in their assessment and linguistic means in different linguistic cultures.

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