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Svitlana FEDORENKO,
orcid.org/0000-0001-8517-9975

Doctor in Educational Sciences,
Professor at the English Theory, Practice and Translation Department
National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute"
(Kyiv, Ukraine) 4me@ukr.net / s.fedorenko@kpi.ua

Olga BESKLETNA,

Senior Lecture at the English Theory, Practice and Translation Department
National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute"
(Kyiv, Ukraine) beskletnaya@gmail.com

RADICALIZATION OF RUSSIAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

The paper aims to consider the language issues related to the radicalization aspect of modern Russian political discourse, its compliance with the level of Russian society, which is a reflection of the cultural, social and political situation prevailing in that society. The study of political discourse as a tool of shaping public consciousness in terms of linguistics makes it possible to understand which political system is behind this discourse. It is stated that the existence of a single decision-making center and the corresponding structure of pro-government communication in Russia exerts a significant impact on its political discourse in terms of multidisciplinary aspect, involving linguistic one as well. It is underlined that an authoritarian regime (such as the one in Russia) can "broadcast" certain emotions through the political discourse, for example, fear – to intimidate and publicly discredit critics of the regime, selectively persecute and openly harass political opponents. It is emphasized that emotionality and negativism are somewhat veiled in Russian political discourse, due to its "dual" nature, inherited from the Soviet times – the "sovietization" of the discourse, on the one hand, and the simulation of basic democratic values and freedoms, on the other hand, especially in the course of Putin's presidency. The stylistic features of the current Russian president's political speeches are generalized, including the widespread use of indirect quotations, rhetorical questions (a question-answer form of a monologue), various stylistic means (hyperbole, metaphors, epithets, personification) as well as figurative language (irony, sarcasm) and phraseological units of a rather negative nature, which altogether increases the emotional and psychological impact on the audience. It is stressed that Putin has laid out key elements of his radical thinking in statements over the years, ranging from the declaration of 2005 to the essay on Ukrainian history in 2021, which is illustrated in the paper on the basis of some of his quotations.

Key words: Russian political discourse, political text, indirect communication style, radicalization, stylistic means.

Світлана ФЕДОРЕНКО,

orcid.org/0000-0001-8517-9975
доктор педагогічних наук,

професор кафедри теорії, практики та перекладу англійської мови
Національного технічного університету України
«Київський політехнічний інститут імені Ігоря Сікорського»
(Київ, Україна) 4me@ukr.net / s.fedorenko@kpi.ua

Ольга БЕСКЛЕТНА,

orcid.org/0000-0002-5522-2909

старший викладач кафедри теорії, практики та перекладу англійської мови
Національного технічного університету України
«Київський політехнічний інститут імені Ігоря Сікорського»
(Київ, Україна) beskletnaya@gmail.com

РАДИКАЛІЗАЦІЯ РОСІЙСЬКОГО ПОЛІТИЧНОГО ДИСКУРСУ

У статті висвітлено деякі лінгвістичні питання, пов'язані з радикалізацією сучасного російського політичного дискурсу, що є відображенням культурної, соціальної та політичної ситуації в цій країні. Вивчення політичного дискурсу як інструменту формування суспільної свідомості з точки зору лінгвістики дає змогу зрозуміти, яка політична система стоїть за цим дискурсом. Зазначено, що існування в Росії єдиного центру прийняття рішень та відповідної структури провладної комунікації мають значний вплив на її політичний дискурс у мульт-

тидисциплінарному аспекті, лінгвістичному в тому числі. Окреслено, що будь-який авторитарний режим (у нашому випадку, російській) може транслювати через політичний дискурс певні емоції, наприклад, страх, щоб залякати та публічно дискредитувати критиків режиму, а також відкрито переслідувати політичних опонентів. Вказано, що емоційність і негативізм децю завуальовані в російському політичному дискурсі через його «подвійну» природу, успадковану з радянських часів – «советизацію» дискурсу, з одного боку, і симуляцію основних демократичних цінностей і свобод, з іншого боку, особливо в період президентства Путіна. Узагальнено стилістичні особливості політичних промов чинного російського президента, з-поміж яких: широке використання непрямих цитат, риторичні запитання та різні стилістичні засоби (гіперболізація, метафори, епітети, персоніфікація), які посилюють емоційно-психологічний вплив на аудиторію. Встановлено, що ключові елементи свого радикального мислення Путін виклав у численних промовах, починаючи від декларації 2005 року і закінчуючи нарисом історії України 2021 року, що проілюстровано у статті його цитатами. Наголошено, що домінуюча політична фігура в Росії, Путін, використовує свою політичну владу для формування російського політичного дискурсу та маргіналізації певних напрямів думок, зокрема тих, які пов'язані з ліберальною демократією, правами людини та вільними виборами.

Ключові слова: російський політичний дискурс, політичний текст, непряме цитування, радикалізації, стилістичні засоби.

Problemstatement. Nowadays, mass politicization is actively taking place, politics is penetrating all spheres of people's lives. Such politicization of public consciousness, in turn, presupposes the fact that political discourse is transformed through the influence of the political situation in the world and in a particular country, adapting to the political situation. Such political changes lead to a change in the consciousness of citizens, which is reflected in language and, consequently, in political discourse.

Moreover, political discourse plays an important role in shaping public consciousness. The study of political discourse in terms of linguistics makes it possible to understand which political system is behind this discourse. Linguistic analysis also makes it possible to increase the effectiveness of political practice, to deepen the impact of political speeches on people's ways of thinking. Political discourse itself is aimed at the future context (while literary one refers to the past, and the mass media – to the present). Future contexts are rather favorable: they are difficult to deny, and impossible to verify at present.

As far as Russian political discourse is concerned, it creates an image and even a model of the enemy. It is the enemy who is always to blame for the fact that the situation is not as planned. The enemy always cements the society that is easy to manage. Political discourse models the interests of the society, i. e., it is formed by “authors” and “consumers”, because their expectations and desires are “embedded” in it. Discourse about the enemy today is an integral part of Russian political discourse. After all, the political reality is still divided into the territory of allies and opponents. In an effort to destroy what is called the enemy, today's democracies are moving away from the democratic ideal, as it is impossible to fight against abstract phenomena without affecting the people who are connected with them (or may be connected). In this context, the oxymoron “war for peace” is a

reality, another semantic paradox of Russian political discourse.

Labels are actively involved in undemocratic political discourse, like Russian one, in order to emphasize the separation into *friends* and *enemies* – division into one's own and another (Gelman, 2015). Discourse about the enemy forms anti-values, can be aimed at objects of several types – living or non-living. If the enemies are a certain group of people with whom they associate the onset of adverse political circumstances, then various forms of intolerance, xenophobia or discrimination flare up in society.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The phenomenon of political discourse is interdisciplinary, and therefore it is the subject of research not only of linguistics but also of other academic fields (political linguistics, political stylistics, linguistics, etc.). Various theoretical, methodological and practical aspects of political discourse are highlighted in the works of many scholars throughout the world (I. Behkta, D. Bollinger, T. van Dijk, J. Diamond, V. Karasik, Yu. Karaulov, O. Parshyna, O. Popov, H. Pocheptsov, M. Shadson, O. Sheigal, O. Varlamova and many others).

As P. Chilton, Professor of Linguistics at the University of East Anglia, states that, sharing the traditions of Western political thought, there is in fact the view that language and politics are closely linked at a fundamental level (Chilton, 2004).

A separate branch of linguistic research, aimed exclusively at the analysis of political discourse, appeared in the twentieth century. Today, a relatively new field “political linguistics” is commonplace (A. Baranov, A. Chudinov, V. Maslova, N. Kondratenko, and others) together, in parallel, with “linguopolithology” (L. Synelnikova), which is characterized by interdisciplinarity. According A. Chudinov, the subject of study of political linguistics is political communication, i. e., speech

activity, focused on the promotion of certain ideas, emotional impact on the citizens of the country, which encourages them to political action, to development of public consent, adoption and justification of socio-political decisions in a multitude of points of view in the society (Chudinov, 2008: 6–7). Therefore, the main function of political communication is struggle for political power, so it is able to emotionally influence the addressee, transforming the existing in the human mind political view of the world (Chudinov, 2008). Thus, the ideological potential and manipulative influence of political communication are stressed and highlighted by many linguists (Yu. Antonov, A. Belova, A. Berezovenko, E. Kulikov O. Parshin, O. Smal, A. Yanovets, and others), as well as the influence on the emotional, rational, moral and ethical spheres of society (V. Amirov, O. Beliakova, K. Kalinin, O. Solovyov, and others).

The purpose of the article. This study aims to consider the language issues related to the radicalization aspect of modern Russian political discourse, its compliance with the level of Russian society, which is a reflection of the cultural, social and political situation prevailing in that society.

Presentation of the main material. The notion “radicalization” refers to the gradual social process into extremism and is often applied to explain changes in ideas or behavior (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary). It deals with the action or process of causing someone to adopt radical positions on political or social issues. In our case we are considering Russian president’s radical positions and stances on political and social issues. As M. Kramer, professor of Harvard University argues: “the dominant political figure in Russia over the past seventeen years, Vladimir Putin, has used his political power to shape the prevailing political discourse and to marginalize certain strains of thought and exclude them from the public arena, particularly those connected with liberal democracy, human rights, and free elections” (Kramer, 2017: 25).

It is well-researched fact that political discourse is formed by political actors, and the peculiarities of the political interaction between them determine, to a great extent, the essence of the political regime in a country. Today, the existence of a single decision-making center and the corresponding structure of pro-government communication have a significant impact on Russian political discourse. An authoritarian regime (such as the one in Russia) can “broadcast” certain emotions through the political discourse, for example, fear – to intimidate and publicly discredit critics of the regime, selectively persecute and openly harass political opponents. However, emotionality and negativism are somewhat veiled in Russian

political discourse, due to its “dual” nature, inherited from the Soviet times, – the “sovietization” of the discourse, on the one hand, and the simulation of basic democratic values and freedoms, on the other hand, especially in the course of Putin’s presidency (Balzer, 2003; Kryshtanovskaya, White, 2009). Direct quotations are less popular in Russian political discourse than indirect ones. In fact, preference is given to the indirect communication style, where all statements of political actors are pre-processed before publishing.

In Putin’s time, the polycentrism inherent in Yeltsin’s policies has been replaced by monocentrism, in which all influential institutions are to support a single center of power headed by Putin. Since Yeltsin’s time, the president has held a position over parties rather than positioning himself as the leader of a particular party or coalition. On the basis of the post-communist cynicism, the Russian leader imposes his vision of the world on the people, as well as constantly discredits the political regimes of other countries, even resorting to verbal aggression (Gorham, 2014). From a linguistic point of view, verbal aggression is also aggression. Therefore, Putin’s speech practice, as A. Berezovenko argues, at the beginning of his reign could be seen as a harbinger of future intensification of the aggressive behavior of the Russian Federation. Today, there is every reason to believe that this reasoning is correct (Berezovenko, 2021).

Modern linguistics, with the view of determining ways of enhancing the emotional and psychological impact of political speeches, pay attention to the use of different stylistic means (such as hyperbolization, metaphors, epithets, personification), which affect the audience (Fedorenko, 2019; Chudinov, 2008). As far as the means of expression most often used by president Putin are concerned, it is worth saying that he exploits quite a variety of stylistic figures. The vivid example of that is his well-known Crimean speech, where Russian president repeatedly utilized rhetorical questions (a question-answer form of a monologue) as well as figurative language (irony, sarcasm) and phraseological units of a rather negative nature. A specific tool inherent in political texts is the use of hyperbole as a means of purposeful strengthening and emphasizing expressiveness, due to which the authors of the political texts try to draw the audience’s attention to the problem under discussion. Determining the position by too saturated means, the speaker sets the goal of mobilizing the audience for further action, gives contrast to the actions. It should be observed that hyperboles are used extensively by Putin, e.g.: “Crimea is a unique fusion of cultures and traditions of different peoples. And this is so similar to

Great Russia, where for centuries no ethnic group has disappeared or dissolved. And when Crimea suddenly found itself in another state, even then Russia felt that it was not just robbed, but robbed” (Crimean speech by Putin, 2014).

Putin has laid out key elements of his radical thinking in statements over the years, ranging from the declaration of 2005 to the essay on Ukrainian history in 2021. The implication of Putin’s historical narrative is that the Ukrainian government, in its current form, is illegitimate and intolerable. To see that let us consider the following two quotes from his speeches mentioned above, relating to 2005 and 2021 respectively:

1. “...The Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama. Tens of millions of our co-citizens and compatriots found themselves outside Russian territory. Moreover, the epidemic of disintegration infected Russia itself” (Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, 2005).

2. “It would not be an exaggeration to say that the path of forced assimilation, the formation of an ethnically pure Ukrainian state, aggressive towards Russia, is comparable in its consequences to the use of weapons of mass destruction against us. As a result of such a harsh and artificial division of Russians and Ukrainians, the Russian people in all may decrease by hundreds of thousands or even millions” (On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians, 2021).

In the first quote we can notice the metaphors *epidemic* and *infected*. He compares the formation of the Ukrainian state with the weapons of mass destruction to Russia.

Furthermore, in the article “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”, July 12, 2021, Putin utilizes a revealing metaphor on these issues – *the virus of nationalism*. “Ukrainian nationalism”, in his view, is an infection introduced to the Russian host by the bolsheviks; when the Soviet Union collapsed, and republics from Ukraine to Estonia to Georgia declared independence, the virus killed its host – Russia.

The analysis of Putin’s public speeches reveals his position that Russia is a country that has been suffering since its formation, and all other states are constantly directing their efforts to undermine it as a world leading country. In particular, it is evidenced by the use of metaphors in the following Putin’s expressions: “Russia suffered”, “Russia she lowered her head and resigned herself”, “bring any conflict to human sacrifice”, “we are threatened today”, etc.

All things considered, we share the opinion of M. Gorham, a researcher at the University of Florida (USA) on the Soviet-era language and the political language of modern Russia, according to which it is already too late to investigate Putin’s speeches – it should have been done ten years ago. As now Putin speaks less and appears less in public (Gorham, 2014). So, by scrutinizing his speeches, we can admit that they are characterized by implicit radicalization, and be prepared for the fact that his words will not be the key to actions.

Conclusions. To conclude, we argue that Putin’s political language is a powerful factor in the formation of the public consciousness of Russians, which has developed in the authoritarian regime of this country. The radicalization of today’s political discourse of the Russian regime in linguistic terms, evident in the stylistic features in the current Russian president’s political speeches (the widespread use of indirect quotations, rhetorical questions, various stylistic means (hyperbole, metaphors, epithets, personification) as well as figurative language (irony, sarcasm) and phraseological units of a rather negative nature), can be explained not only by the economic interests of the ruling elites, but also against the background of the parallel rise of revolutionary imperialism in Russia. The latter is explained by the fact that the Putin regime itself remains reactionary and its foreign policy seeks to revive the Russian empire.

The scope of further study lies in conducting corpus-based research of Russian current political texts with a large degree of completeness in given time slices, which, in turn, is the basis for fruitful comparative linguistic research.

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