

SLANG AND ITS ROLE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract: The general features of the social and political discourse are examined in the article from the point of view of relations between people and the society and those linguistic instruments which are used by the power to influence and control people. Slang and its functions are analyzed as one of the most important and unique linguistic phenomena.

Slang as a lexical unit is a very unique phenomenon. On the one hand it can be peculiar for a particular group of people thus differentiating the latter from other groups. On the other hand slang can transfer from one group to another one and even be used by the whole society if it characterizes those things which are demanded by this society. It takes an intermediate place between a literary language and the so called lower lexical units used by criminals and illiterate people. Therefore it is rather interesting to consider slang and its role in the social and political discourse where literary words are usually used. But the contemporary society is influenced by so many factors including innovations in different spheres that it has become quite normal to come across slang words and expressions in newspaper articles, politicians' speech etc. So the question is what role slang plays in the social and political discourse and whether it is proper to use slang in this sphere. The object of our study is Russian social and political discourse.

First of all let us consider the general features of the social and political discourse. This type of discourse is in fact the representation of the whole complex of relations between a man and the society and therefore it is functionally aimed at the formation of some fragment of the world perception on the part of the participants of the discourse. Analyzing the social and political discourse one can understand how cultural values are modeled, how a social order is propagandized, how a conceptual perception of the world on the part of native speakers is formed [11, p. 26].

As A.P. Chudinov notes the main features of modern Linguistics are quite proper for the modern political Linguistics: anthropocentrism (a man speaking some language becomes a starting point in the study of lingual phenomena), expansionism (the inclusion of some adjacent problems into the sphere of Linguistics, i.e. its expansion), functionalism (the study of the language in its activity, i.e. the study of its functions), explanatoriness (a tendency not only to describe lingual facts but also to explain them) [17, p. 17].

There is no common definition of the social and political discourse today, however, we can consider it to be a verbal communication in some particular social and

psychological context where all the participants of the discourse have special social roles according to their participation in the social and political life which is the subject of the communication. In the linguistic literature the term “social and political discourse” is used in the narrow and broad sense. The last one means that it includes such forms of communication in which at least one of the following components comprises the sphere of social and political relations: a subject, an addressee or the contents of the communication. In the narrow sense the social and political discourse is a type of discourse the aim of which is the conquest, maintenance and execution of the political power. We accept the broad sense of this discourse including into it the process and the result of the creation, perception of texts as well as extralinguistic factors which influence their creation and perception because the understanding of texts must be formed on the base of the integrity of all lingual and non-lingual factors.

The examined discourse is the product of the collision of different interests and strategies, equally strong ideas, efforts of the participants of this discourse [10, p. 170]. The aim of the social and political discourse is not in fact the description but the persuasion of the addressee and his stimulation to act. That is why the efficiency of the social and political discourse should be defined according to this aim. The main thing is the formation of some point of view on the part of the participant – recipient of the discourse about this or that event in the social and political life of some particular country. It is stipulated by beliefs of participants – producers of the discourse and created by the “complex interlacing of two kinds of stereotypes: lingual ones which are connected with semantic preferences of the language itself and communicative ones which are connected with those norms of behaviour and values accepted in the society. The persuasion is effective only in the case if it is achieved with the use of the principles reflecting accepted manners of behaviour and relations in the team” [11, p. 33].

Social and political relations are mainly expressed by means of the language which helps political leaders, journalists, analysts and others enter a recipient’s personal sphere, manipulating his consciousness both with the help of colloquial words and phrases and such linguistic means as metaphor, slang etc. We interpret manipulation as imposing points of view, opinions, actions on the population. What is more the addresser can consider them false but profitable for himself. As for the power of the language it is used in any society. So at the time of the Soviet dictatorship the language was a necessary tool for the total control of the society. In the democratic society the proper use of the language actively forms the public opinion needed by the government, i.e. it is also an important tool for conquering and maintaining the power.

There are both lingual and non-lingual factors in the social and political discourse. Interpreting the social and political discourse in its integrity one must not pay attention only to lingual moments because its sense and purpose will be unnoticed. The analysis of this type of discourse implies the knowledge about the background, the expectations of the author and the audience, hidden motives, some scenario and beloved logical consequences particular for a definite period.

The study of the social and political discourse can help to find out those signs which are proper for the latter at this period of the development of the society as well as to define historical and specific national features of the social and political discourse. The social and political discourse does not have only sense (it corresponds to the reality) but it also has an important meaning (it is connected with a definite group or groups of people).

Now let us analyze those functions which slang has in the contemporary social and political discourse. Paying attention to the opinion of such linguists as E. Partridge and V.A. Homjakov we have singled out the following functions of slang. It

- 1) gives speech a novelty effect;
- 2) introduces elements of a joke;
- 3) makes speech emotional;

- 4) possesses expressivity and evaluation;
- 5) names things and phenomena (a nominative function);
- 6) makes speech familiar;
- 7) implies some sense;
- 8) adds elements of a language game.

So, on the whole it has communicative functions.

Let us consider the following extracts of Russian social and political discourse to find out the functions of slang in it.

«В течение трех месяцев данные будут изучать в регионах вместе с руководителями вузов-аутсайдеров в специальных рабочих группах» [1];

«Митингуете на улице и получаете драйв» [7];

«Так стоит ли искусственно создавать социальный коллапс, решая проблему дефицитного триллиона?» [8];

«...на недавней планерке он отметил их пассивную позицию по вопросам предоставления займов предприятиям реального сектора экономики» [13].

The following words in these extracts refer to slang: *аутсайдеры*, *драйв*, *коллапс*, *планерка*.

There is neither a novelty effect nor elements of a joke in these examples. As for making speech emotional then first of all we should note that a word has an emotional component if it “expresses some emotion or feeling, that is characterizes a described object, shows a speaker’s attitude to it” [4, p. 106]. We can say that this function is performed. The words *аутсайдеры* and *коллапс* have a negative connotation and the word *драйв* has a positive one.

As for expressivity and evaluation it should be said that “a word possesses an evaluating component if it expresses a particular idea about the thing it names, i.e. approval or disapproval” [4, p. 108]. Expressivity is defined by E.G. Belyaevskaya as “a component of a word meaning indicating the intensification of signs comprising the basis of the substantial content of the word” [6, p. 51]. In T.N. Ushakova’s opinion it is often realized “morphologically and is stipulated by the expressivity of word-forming means, i.e. affixes and models and types of word-formation” [15, p. 152].

Hence the evaluation function of the words *аутсайдеры* and *коллапс* is the expression of disapproval. The word *драйв* positively evaluates those emotions which people can have in a particular situation. Expressivity is not seen here clearly. The nominative function is performed in these examples.

As for making speech familiar we should note that this function is not always performed by slang in the speech of public and political figures.

The last function does not take place in the examples.

In addition three words in the above given extracts are borrowings from the English language. So the word *аутсайдер* comes from English *outsider*, that means «someone who does not belong to a particular group or organization» [18]. In the social and political discourse as well as in many other types of the discourse the word *аутсайдер* has got a more extensive interpretation, implying a person or an organization who or which is out of some activity connected both with the work in some particular institution or some group.

The word *драйв* comes from English *drive* and has several meanings the closest of which from the point of their use in Russian are: 1) «a feeling that makes you act in a particular way»; 2) «the energy and determination that makes you try hard to achieve something» [18]. This word is also used in many other types of the discourse including those emotions which people can have either belonging to some social and political group or not belonging to it and doing some activity. In the social and political discourse it can mean, on the one hand, the whole range of feelings and emotions which

a public or a political figure can have observing the effect which his words or real acts produce (rallies of people loudly expressing their point of view to support this political figure, meetings etc.). On the other hand, people participating in rallies, protest campaigns, meetings etc. get some drive due to their joint actions and the feeling of unity. It is *a drive* that makes the young and the old go into streets to state their position in this or that social and political problem.

The word *коллапс* comes from English *collapse*, that means «a situation in which something fails or stops existing» [18]. In the examined discourse this word is used in different context meaning the destruction of something. In the example given above the participant of the discourse asks a question about *a social collapse*, implying the destruction of the social life of the society which includes many aspects: a job, a social life, a cultural life etc. The word *коллапс* in this case helps the participant of the discourse describe those destructive changes which can take place in ordinary people's lives meaning "the destruction" itself and something unknown and not always pleasant that is usually connected with foreign words replacing native language words and concealing the real situation in such a way.

The word *планерка* is the shortening of «*плановое заседание, совещание или встреча работников или руководителей какого-то предприятия или отдела с целью решения возникших проблем (первоначально с целью разработки плана работы на определенный период времени)*». The use of the suffix *-к* makes this word familiar and understates its main meaning.

Having analyzed in such a way other slang words and expressions which are used in various extracts of the social and political discourse we came to the conclusion that some part of these words is formed with the help of borrowings mainly from the English language.

To E. Haugen's mind these borrowings can be structurally differentiated into three types:

1) "words without any morphological substitution (loanwords), i.e. they fully correspond to their prototypes in the donor language";

2) "words with a partial morphological substitution (loan-blends) or hybrids, i.e. words which partially consist of elements of a foreign language";

3) "words with a complete morphological substitution, i.e. loan-shifts or semantic loans" [16, p. 352].

Loan-shifts in their turn are divided into borrowed formations which represent the translation of every morpheme of the donor language by means of the receiving language, and borrowed meanings, i.e. meanings which were got by the words in the receiving language under the influence of functionally corresponding words of the donor language.

Due to this borrowings in the above given extracts of the social and political discourse are words without any morphological substitution. Other examples of this can be found in the following extracts:

«Выборы выиграны, афтерпати закончено. Оооор!» [9].

Афтерпати comes from English *afterparty*, that means "a period of time after a party". In the social and political discourse these are solemn events dedicated to something for example successful elections.

«Но все они составляют ядро сельхозпроизводителей, которые трудятся сегодня на земле, несмотря на дорожную технику, ГСМ и запчасти, неустойчивую погоду и возможные форс-мажоры» [3].

Форс-мажоры comes from English *force majeure*, that means: 1) «an unexpected event that stops you doing something you promised to do in a contract»; 2) «a greater strength or power» [18]. In the examined discourse the word *форс-мажоры* is used exactly in the meaning of unexpected events which can include everything beginning

with somebody's absence from work and finishing with the lack of some important material etc.

There are also loan-shifts, for example:

Говорящая голова comes from English *talking head*, meaning the speech of a TV commentator, an expert who was shown in close-up. At first the expression "говорящая голова" was used in 1992 in «Независимая газета» and quickly became fashionable – in 1993 it was frequently used in mass media. It is often used to describe TV dictators and other TV staff as well as those who regularly appear on TV (deputies, bureaucrats, political scientists etc.) [14].

«Напряженность на мировых рынках, особенно emerging markets, не спадает. Латиноамериканские экономисты уже прозвали давление на их рынки под воздействием событий в России vodka effect. Интересно, что министр финансов Мексики, беря пример с Бориса Ельцина, обвинившего во всем мировой кризис, назвал события в нашей стране главной причиной атак на мексиканскую валюту. Среди наших восточных соседей, в первых рядах пострадавших от очередного кризиса в России, находится Южная Корея, срочно запросившая очередной кредит у Японии» [14].

The expression *водка-эффект* comes from English *vodka effect*. The negative influence of the August crisis in Russia in 1998 on the economies of other states was called so in the West [14].

Moreover we can single out the words with a partial morphological substitution or hybrids, for example:

«Обама сделал в последнее время особый упор, обещая им различные «пряники», включая легализацию «инфильтрантов» (это те, которые, как самураи, по ночам переходят границу у реки) и облегчение натурализации» [9].

The word *инфильтрант* comes from English *infiltrate*, that means: 1) «to secretly join an organization or go into a place in order to find out information about it or damage it»; 2) «to become a feature of something gradually, without anyone noticing it» [18]. In Russian social and political discourse the noun *инфильтрант* was derived from the verb *инфильтровать* by analogy with the words *эмигрант*, *коммерсант* etc. However one should pay attention to the fact that the word unlike its first meaning is used in the meaning *people crossing the border across the river*, i.e. describing exactly those who illegally cross the border and appear on the territory of another state but whose aim is to improve their well-being rather than to harm another state and its policy.

«Мы только пытаемся сделать что-то современное или украсть технологии» [5].

«Если деревня, то русские народные костюмы! Правда, не обычные, а современные, на современный лад!», – так решила студентка...» [12].

The word *современное* comes from English *modern*, that means «using new styles that are very different from the styles of the past» [18]. In the examined discourse the suffix *-ов* and the ending *-ый* typical for many Russian adjectives (*фруктовый*, *брезентовый*, *абрикосовый* etc.) were added to the stem "модерн" which is also used in Russian as a separate word thus giving a foreign word the originality of the people of another state as well as an element of a joke.

«Наладить тесное сотрудничество между профессиональными учебными заведениями и производством проще в тех городах, где существуют промышленные гиганты, которые, по сути, патронируют колледжи и вузы» [2].

The word *патронируют* comes from English *patron*, that means 1) «someone who supports the work of writers, artists, musicians etc., especially by giving them money»; 2) «a famous person who supports an organization and allows it to use their name in its advertising» [18]. In Russian social and political discourse the verb

патронировать was derived from the noun *патрон*, which is also used in the meaning of *шеф, начальник* in some cases, by analogy with many Russian verbs (*куруировать, агитировать, организовывать* etc.). The meaning of this verb was extended and now includes any help given to a separate person or some organization on the part of some sponsors who can be not only and not always celebrities but also those who are powerful enough and have an opportunity to do this. It should be noted that there is a verb “to patronize” in English but its meaning differs very much from the meaning that the same verb has in Russian (to patronize – 1) «to behave or talk in a way that shows you think you are more intelligent or important than someone»; 2) «to use a restaurant, hotel, or other business» [18]).

We would also like to draw your attention to the fact that in Russian social and political discourse such words are used which are considered to be slang in the examined discourse in other countries. Let us give you some examples.

Альбатрос comes from English “*albatross around the neck*”. It is a figurative expression symbolizing “a great burden”. It was taken from “The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner”, by an English poet (1772–1834) S.T. Colridge, in which a mariner who had killed an albatross and thus had committed a serious sin was punished by sailors who put this albatross around his neck. In English political slang this term is used to describe politicians who face great practically insoluble problems.

The assistant of the American President on the problems of national security Sandy Berger was the first to use this term and then it appeared on the pages of many American newspapers and magazines, American TV audience heard this term in TV programmes when it went about Vladimir Putin who was deputy President of Russia at that time. The matter is that in American political slang “*albatross*” means some burden which it is very difficult to get rid of. Sandy Berger said it exactly about Chechnya as “an albatross around the neck” of the Russian leader [14]. One more example is:

«Ожидая лифт, я слышал ключевые слова: «баксы», «девятка», «джип». Молодой оратор выдвигал себя в качестве учителя жизни, точно знающего, что надо делать: на «баксы» – подержанный «жигуль», а по возвращении в Питер, если удастся, обмен на американский джип» [14].

The word *баксы* comes from American English “*buck*”, that means “dollar” and is considered to be a slang word for the description of the American dollar. In Russian mass media this word was firstly used at the beginning of the 1990-s.

To sum it up we can say that slang plays an important role in Russian social and political discourse making speech emotional and expressive and naming some ordinary things in a new way. All types of borrowings are used in the process of the formation of slang in the examined social and political discourse basically on the base of the English language. It is quite proper nowadays to use slang in this sphere in order to attract the attention of the audience, to persuade it to follow some social and political course and to govern the society in such a way.

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Сленг и его роль в современном общественно-политическом дискурсе

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Ключевые слова и фразы: вербальная коммуникация; дискурс; заимствования; неязыковые факторы; сленг; языковые факторы.

Аннотация: Рассмотрены общие особенности общественно-политического дискурса с точки зрения отношений между людьми и обществом и те языковые инструменты, которые используются властью для влияния и контроля над людьми. Проанализированы сленг и его функции как наиболее важного и уникального языкового явления.

Slang und seine Rolle im modernen sozial-politischen Discourse

Zusammenfassung: Es sind die allgemeinen Besonderheiten des sozial-politischen Discourses aus der Sicht der Verhältnissen zwischen den Menschen und der Gesellschaft und diejenige linguistische Instrumente, die von den Behörden für den Einfluss und die Kontrolle über den Menschen benutzt werden, betrachtet. Es sind das Slang und seine Funktionen als des höchstwichtigen und unikalen linguistischen Phänomens analysiert.

Slang et son rôle dans le discours contemporain social et politique

Résumé: Sont examinées les particularités communes du discours social et politique du point de vue des relations entre les gens et la société ainsi que les instruments de la langue qui sont employés par les autorités pour l'influence et le contrôle du peuple. Sont analysés le slang et ses fonctions comme un des plus importants phénomènes de la langue.

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