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COMMUNICATIVE-PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN ENGLISH POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract: The article investigates the communicative-pragmatic functions performed by phraseological units (PU) in English-language political discourse. The theoretical basis of the study is the communicative-pragmatic paradigm of phraseology developed within Russian phraseological research, which treats a phraseological sign not as a static nominative unit of the lexical system but as an instrument of concrete speech activity realized by a subject with respect to an addressee within a definite communicative-pragmatic situation (Dobrydneva, 2000). This model is applied to the material of English political discourse with the help of two complementary strands of research: a cognitive-discursive description of the conceptual structures that condition the selection of phraseological units in British and American political media texts (Chaykina, 2012), and an institutional-pragmatic description of political discourse as a genre of public communication oriented simultaneously toward information and influence [10; 15; 20]. On this combined theoretical basis, the article proposes an eight-function taxonomy of the communicative-pragmatic potential of PU in English political discourse and discusses how cognitive conceptual structuring, institutional genre constraints, and the classical apparatus of phraseology and speech-act theory jointly explain why the phraseological sign is structurally indispensable to the language of politics.

Keywords: phraseological unit, communicative-pragmatic paradigm, political discourse, pragmatic function, connotation, conceptual metaphor, speech act, addressee factor, persuasion, manipulation.

Introduction

Political discourse is, by its institutional nature, discourse of struggle for and exercise of power; it is addressed to a mass, heterogeneous audience and is designed to shape, reinforce or redirect that audience's evaluative and behavioral attitudes (Sheigal, 2000). Because a politician's or a journalist's utterance is always calculated for a public effect, English political texts show a consistently high density of phraseological units: idioms, proverbial sayings, phraseologized collocations and quasi-phraseological formulas. This is not accidental. A phraseological sign combines in its semantic structure a denotative core with a rich connotative component — evaluative, emotive, expressive, functional-stylistic — which makes it an economical, image-bearing means of exerting pragmatic influence within the tight spatial and time constraints of a newspaper article, a parliamentary speech or a televised interview [8; 18].

The present article sets itself the task of describing the communicative-pragmatic functions that phraseological units perform in English political discourse. Rather than treating phraseology merely as a closed inventory of "ready-made" figurative labels — the view that dominated the classical structural-semantic stage of phraseological studies [1; 6; 12] — the article adopts the communicative-pragmatic approach to phraseological meaning, in which a phraseological unit is studied as it is used: as an instrument by which a communicating subject, endowed with phraseological competence, pursues a concrete communicative goal with respect to a concrete addressee, in a concrete sphere and

genre of speech activity (Dobrydneva, 2000). This theoretical choice is deliberate. Of the several approaches available within the broader phraseological and discourse-analytic tradition — structural-semantic [1; 6; 12], cognitive-conceptual [4; 13; 19], and culturological-institutional [7; 15; 20] — it is precisely the communicative-pragmatic paradigm that places the subject–addressee relation, the speaker's intention, and the situational meaning of the sign at the centre of analysis, which corresponds directly to the topic of the present study. At the same time, the cognitive and institutional strands of research are not discarded but integrated into the discussion, since they explain, respectively, why a given phraseological image becomes available for a political text and why political discourse as an institution structurally requires a sign of exactly this evaluative, economical, image-bearing kind.

1. Phraseological Units between Structural-Semantic and Communicative-Pragmatic Description

Classical phraseology described the phraseological unit primarily as a reproducible, semantically transformed combination of words, focusing on criteria of idiomaticity, stability and separateness of nomination. N.N. Amosova's contextological theory defined a phraseological unit through the notion of a fixed context in which a word component realizes a meaning obtainable only within that combination (Amosova, 1963). V.V. Vinogradov's classical typology of phraseological fusions, unities and combinations, formulated within the framework of Russian lexicology, established the very categorial apparatus (idiomaticity, motivation, componential stability) that later phraseological schools, including those working on English material, would continue to refine (Vinogradov, 1977). A.V. Kunin's extensive course of English phraseology systematized the structural-semantic, stylistic and etymological description of English idiomatic and phraseomatic units and remains the reference point for practically every subsequent study of English phraseology, including studies of its functioning in political texts (Kunin, 1996). A.N. Baranov and D.O. Dobrovolsky, in their generalizing treatment of the aspects of phraseological theory, explicitly registered the shift of the discipline from a purely systemic-structural description toward cognitive and communicative parameters of phraseological meaning (Baranov & Dobrovolsky, 2008) — a shift of which the communicative-pragmatic paradigm applied in the present article is a direct continuation.

What the structural-semantic stage of phraseology left largely outside its scope was precisely the question that concerns political discourse most: *why*, in a given communicative act, a speaker selects a phraseological rather than a neutral lexical means, and *what* that selection accomplishes for the speaker with respect to a listener. Answering this question requires moving from a systemic to an activity-based model of phraseological meaning — the move that defines the communicative-pragmatic paradigm proper.

2. The Communicative-Pragmatic Paradigm of Phraseology

The communicative-pragmatic paradigm of phraseology, as formulated within the anthropocentric turn of late twentieth-century linguistics, rests on the activity principle: language units, including phraseological ones, are studied not as elements of an abstract system but as instruments of concrete speech activity performed by a "human in language" (Dobrydneva, 2000). Central to this paradigm is the notion of a communicative-pragmatic situation, whose obligatory parameters include: (a) a subject possessing phraseological competence and pursuing definite communicative goals; (b) an addressee who perceives, understands and interprets phraseological meaning; (c) the general purpose of the communicative-pragmatic activity, which conditions the choice of both the manner of communication and the phraseological means themselves; (d) the sphere of the communicants' activity, i.e. the sphere of speech communication; (e) the speech genre; and (f) the phraseological context or co-situation (Dobrydneva, 2000). A phraseological unit realized within such a situation actualizes not only its systemic (dictionary) meaning but a situational-contextual meaning, shaped by the evaluative

enantiosemy, polysemy of emotive colouring, and semantic broadening (eurysemy) characteristic of phraseological semantics (Dobrydneva, 2000).

Within this model, connotation is treated as the leading pragmatically oriented component of phraseological meaning. V.N. Teliya's semantic-pragmatic and linguo-culturological description of Russian phraseology, which strongly influenced the communicative-pragmatic school, showed that it is connotation — evaluative, emotive, expressive, stylistic — that largely determines the informational value and the pragmatic potential of a phraseological sign, allowing it to convey the speaker's value-laden attitude toward the world, his or her emotional state, and to produce the pragmatic effect necessary for realizing a communicative intention (Teliya, 1996). This is fully consonant with N.D. Arutyunova's general definition of linguistic pragmatics as the study of language in relation to those who use it — the study of how meaning is adjusted to the conditions of a concrete act of communication (Arutyunova, 1990). The dominant position of the connotative component is, in turn, explained by a principle of secondary anthropocentrism: the phraseological sign both encodes an anthropomorphic way of construing reality and is selected by the speaker in accordance with a specific communicative-pragmatic goal (Dobrydneva, 2000). It is this dual, subject-centred nature of phraseological meaning that makes the notion of "phraseological competence" — the language personality's ability to select, transform and correctly decode phraseological signs in discourse — a key category of communicative-pragmatic phraseology (Dobrydneva, 2000).

It is worth noting that the very term "pragmatic," central to this paradigm, is inherited from speech-act theory. J.L. Austin's foundational distinction between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts established that an utterance is, above all, a form of doing rather than merely stating (Austin, 1986), while J. Searle's subsequent systematization of illocutionary acts clarified the conditions under which an utterance counts as a particular kind of communicative act (Searle, 1986). Read against this background, the communicative-pragmatic model of phraseology can be understood as extending speech-act theory to the level of the phraseological sign: a phraseological unit realized in discourse is not simply a figurative name but the performance of an illocutionary act — an evaluation, a warning, a promise, an accusation — carried out by figurative rather than direct means.

For the purposes of the present study, three theses of the communicative-pragmatic paradigm are especially productive. First, a PU is not merely named but performs an action: its use is itself a communicative-pragmatic act directed at realizing the speaker's intention. Second, the same systemic phraseological meaning may be actualized differently depending on the parameters of the communicative-pragmatic situation — including, crucially, the sphere of communication (here, institutional political communication) and the genre (a speech, an interview, an op-ed). Third, phraseological transformation — variation, renewal, occasional restructuring of a PU's component composition — is itself communicatively motivated: it is precisely communicative necessity that stimulates the variative modification and creation of new figurative language means (Dobrydneva, 2000). All three theses will be applied below to the specific institutional and cognitive conditions of English political discourse.

3. Political Discourse as an Institutional Communicative-Pragmatic Space

Political discourse occupies an intermediate position in the system of functional styles, situated between the axis of institutionality (scientific style — belles-lettres style) and the axis of rationality (official-business style — colloquial style); this intermediate status is explained by its dual communicative purpose: to inform a broad audience and simultaneously to shape or transform that audience's value attitudes, opinions and evaluations (Popova, 1995). Correspondingly, political-discourse texts are marked by (a) an overt manifestation of "authorial involvement" in what is being reported; (b) a socially evaluative character of the statement; (c) an alternation of expressive and standardized language means; (d) an equal role of logical and figurative elements; and (e) an inter-

stylistic character of the utterance as a whole (Popova, 1995). E.I. Sheygal's semiotic description of political discourse similarly defines its core intention as the struggle for power, realized through a specialized sign system in which ordinary lexical and phraseological units acquire additional ideological and evaluative loading once they enter the political sphere (Sheigal, 2000). V.Z. Demyankov, approaching political discourse from the standpoint of political-science philology, likewise stresses that a political text is never merely informative: it is constructed to be interpreted as an argument for or against a particular political position, which places argumentative and persuasive strategies at the very centre of the genre (Demyankov, 2002).

Political communication, in other words, institutionally requires a language resource that is simultaneously evaluative, image-bearing and economical — precisely the profile that a phraseological sign supplies. T.M. Grushevskaya's study of the political newspaper discourse confirms this from the linguo-pragmatic side, showing that the press variety of political discourse systematically exploits figurative and phraseological resources to achieve compression of argument within the constraints of headline and lead-paragraph genres (Grushevskaya, 2002). R. Wodak's discourse-analytic model of the relationship between language, discourse and politics further emphasizes that political language is inseparable from the social and institutional conditions of its production and reception, so that a phraseological choice is never a purely stylistic decision but is co-determined by the institutional role of speaker and addressee (Wodak, 1997). This is consonant with P. Chilton's programmatic account of political-discourse analysis, in which the deployment of figurative language, including idiom, is treated as one of the principal strategic resources through which political actors manage legitimation, coercion and representation (Chilton, 2008), and with N. Fairclough's account of media discourse, which stresses that the mass-mediated form of political communication imposes its own constraints — compression, accessibility, audience design — on the choice of linguistic means, phraseology included (Fairclough, 1995).

Two further institutional features of political discourse determine the specific work performed by phraseological units within it. First, influence in political communication relies heavily on explicit and implicit persuasion, with argumentation, appeal to authority and, not infrequently, manipulative transactions among the recurrent discursive moves that structure political interaction (Popova, 1995). A phraseological unit, whose evaluative and emotive connotation is normally backgrounded rather than overt, is an efficient vehicle for implicit, indirect evaluation — it allows a speaker to pass a judgement while ostensibly only "naming" a state of affairs. Second, political discourse is inseparably bound up with the construction of a politician's public image: the interactive plane of political communication presupposes both self-presentation and the characterization of an opponent (Popova, 1995). Idiomatic self-description ("to keep one's word," "to be a safe pair of hands") and idiomatic characterization of rivals ("to shift the blame," "a wolf in sheep's clothing") therefore serve, respectively, positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation — two complementary strategies of the same institutional game.

Genre further differentiates how phraseology is deployed within political discourse. N.P. Geraskina's study of phraseological configurations in parliamentary speeches shows that substantival phraseological units in the oratorical, face-to-face genre of debate cluster around argumentative and evaluative functions tied to the immediate rhetorical exchange between speakers (Geraskina, 1978), whereas in the mass-mediated genres analysed by Grushevskaya and Chaykina the same phraseological resources are additionally shaped by the requirement of textual compression and by an anticipated, non-present mass addressee [9; 18]. The press interview, as described by Popova on Russian and German material, adds a further genre-specific factor: because an interview unfolds as a dialogic exchange between a journalist and a politician, the choice of allusive and idiomatic material is

calibrated to assumed shared background knowledge between the two institutional participants and, through them, the wider readership (Popova, 1995).

4. Cognitive-Discursive Preconditions for Phraseological Selection

Communicative-pragmatic functioning presupposes prior selection: before a PU can perform a pragmatic function in a text, something in the conceptual organization of that text must condition its appearance. Cognitive-discursive research into English-language political media texts shows that the choice of phraseological units is far from arbitrary: it is governed by the conceptual structures underlying the semantic content of the text, the author selecting concepts capable of realizing the main idea and of exerting pragmatic influence on the reader (Chaykina, 2012). This cognitive premise goes back to G. Lakoff and M. Johnson's theory of conceptual metaphor, according to which abstract domains of experience — including political life — are habitually structured in terms of more concrete source domains, so that the metaphor is not a decorative trope but a basic mechanism of thought that surfaces in language as systematic families of idiomatic expressions (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). A.N. Baranov and Yu.N. Karaulov's corpus-based dictionary of Russian political metaphor demonstrated, on a large body of material, exactly how systematically such conceptual mappings recur in political usage (Baranov & Karaulov, 1991), and A.P. Chudinov's programme of political linguistics extended this line of research into a general theory of metaphorical modelling in political communication, with the metaphor treated as an instrument of the cognitive and pragmatic structuring of political reality for a mass addressee (Chudinov, 2003). E.V. Budaev and A.P. Chudinov's survey of foreign political linguistics situates this cognitive-metaphorical strand within a broader international research tradition that includes, among others, the critical and rhetorical approaches to political metaphor developed in Anglophone scholarship (Budaev & Chudinov, 2008), most notably J. Charteris-Black's account of the persuasive power of metaphor in politicians' rhetoric, which shows how a speaker's selection of a particular conceptual domain (war, sport, journey, disease) is itself a rhetorical strategy calculated for a specific persuasive effect on the audience (Charteris-Black, 2005).

Two configurations of concepts are shown to generate PU in English political discourse: metaphoric concepts, in which figurative-conceptual domains such as ACTION, JOURNEY, WAR, SPORT, GAMBLING, THEATRE, MUSIC, BUSINESS and LOVE/MARRIAGE structure political reality (hence idioms such as to pass the baton, to be on the same page, to throw down the gauntlet, a level playing field, to raise the stakes, to steal the show, to strike the right chord, to seal the deal, a marriage of convenience); and non-metaphoric concepts — POWER/INFLUENCE, COMPETITION, SUPERIORITY, DIFFICULTY, THE FUTURE, SUCCESS, FAILURE, CRITICISM, HONESTY, DECEPTION, EMOTION, RISK and MISTAKE — which either independently condition the appearance of a PU or participate jointly with metaphoric representation (Chaykina, 2012). Correspondingly, certain factors have been shown to inhibit phraseological realization in a text: the absence of a metaphoric concept in the underlying conceptual structure, an excessively generalized (unfocused) metaphoric concept, and the absence of stylistic, lexical, grammatical or visual actualizers of the relevant concept in the co-text (Chaykina, 2012).

This cognitive layer of description is not a rival to the communicative-pragmatic model but its necessary complement: cognitive concepts explain *why* a given figurative domain becomes available for phraseological expression in a political text, while the communicative-pragmatic parameters (subject, addressee, purpose, genre) explain *what the speaker does* with the phraseological unit once it has been selected — that is, which pragmatic function it is made to serve.

5. A Functional Taxonomy of Communicative-Pragmatic Functions of PU in English Political Discourse

On the basis of the theoretical model outlined above, the communicative-pragmatic functions performed by phraseological units in English political discourse can be grouped as follows.

A) Nominative-evaluative function. A PU simultaneously names a political action, actor or state of affairs and passes a value judgement on it, since a phraseological sign is rarely axiologically neutral: to describe a decision as *a leap in the dark* is to name an action while classing it as reckless. This dual naming-and-evaluating capacity follows directly from the dominant role of the evaluative connotative component in phraseological semantics [11; 17].

B) Expressive-emotive function. Because phraseological units possess a heightened emotive-expressive colouring, they allow a politician or commentator to convey an attitude — indignation, irony, approval, alarm — more vividly than a neutral paraphrase would, thereby increasing the illocutionary force of the utterance and its impact on the addressee's emotional state [11; 14].

C) Persuasive-argumentative (and, where relevant, manipulative) function. Political discourse relies on argumentation, explicit or implicit, as its principal means of influencing the audience [10; 15]. A PU built on a familiar conceptual domain (WAR, SPORT, JOURNEY) transfers the inferential structure of that domain onto the political situation, making a conclusion feel self-evident without it being stated as an explicit claim — precisely the mechanism by which figurative language becomes an instrument of pragmatic and, at times, manipulative influence on the recipient of information [18; 22]. Expressions such as *to cross the Rubicon*, *to be at a crossroads* or *to fight an uphill battle* do not merely describe; they pre-package an evaluation of the situation's difficulty or irreversibility that the addressee is invited to accept along with the description.

C) Addressee-orientation (phatic-adaptive) function. Since the parameters of the communicative-pragmatic situation include the addressee and the sphere of communication (Dobrydneva, 2000), the choice of a PU is calibrated to the assumed background knowledge and expectations of a mass audience: politically loaded idioms and topical catch-phrases (e.g. red line, level playing field) function as shared cultural shorthand that presupposes and reinforces common ground between speaker and audience, a mechanism especially salient in genres such as the press interview, where the participants' shared background knowledge conditions the choice of allusive and idiomatic material (Popova, 1995).

D) Self-presentation and other-characterization (image-building) function.

In keeping with the interactive plane of political discourse, which regularly opposes self-description to the characterization of an opponent [15; 20], phraseological units are recruited asymmetrically: idioms of steadfastness, competence and integrity (*to stand one's ground*, *a safe pair of hands*) build the speaker's own image, while idioms of duplicity, evasiveness or weakness (*to sit on the fence*, *to pass the buck*, *a wolf in sheep's clothing*) are directed at political rivals.

E) Text-compressive (economy) function. A phraseological unit operates in a political text as a compact "micro-text," capable of unfolding a whole situational scenario within a syntactically short unit and thereby saving the strictly limited space of a headline, a soundbite or a lead paragraph [9; 18]. This compressive capacity is what makes phraseology structurally indispensable to genres — newspaper articles, televised statements — that combine high informational density with severe spatial or temporal constraints, and it is equally visible, if differently distributed, in the oratorical genre of parliamentary debate (Geraskina, 1978).

F) Mitigating-euphemistic function. Precisely because the evaluative component of a PU can be backgrounded behind its figurative "literal" reading, phraseological units are also exploited for the opposite communicative task — to soften, generalize or evade direct responsibility (*mistakes were made*, *to take a step back*, *to explore all options*), thereby allowing a politician to acknowledge a difficulty while withholding an explicit admission of fault. This function, too, follows from the same source as functions 5.1–5.3: it is because the connotative-evaluative layer of a PU can be foregrounded or left implicit that the same sign can serve either sharp evaluation or its deliberate softening, depending on the speaker's communicative-pragmatic goal.

G) Cohesive-structuring function. Beyond the level of the single utterance, phraseological units also participate in organizing political texts as coherent wholes: a recurrent PU (or its occasional variation) can serve as a thematic anchor across the successive "moves" of a political text or dialogic exchange, marking a return to, or a departure from, the argumentative line the speaker is pursuing — a discourse-organizing role documented for public-communication texts more generally (Fairclough, 1995) and consonant with the compressive, "micro-text" nature of the phraseological sign discussed above (Chaykina, 2012).

Conclusion

Approached through the communicative-pragmatic paradigm of phraseology, a phraseological unit in English political discourse is best understood not as a fixed lexical curiosity but as a situationally activated communicative-pragmatic act: its systemic meaning is realized through situational-contextual meaning shaped by the subject, the addressee, the communicative purpose, the institutional sphere and the genre of political communication (Dobrydneva, 2000). The cognitive-discursive layer of description shows that this activation is itself conditioned by the metaphoric and non-metaphoric conceptual structures organizing a political text's semantics [13; 18; 19], while the institutional description of political discourse explains why an evaluative, image-bearing, economical sign of exactly this kind is structurally in demand in a discourse whose defining task is to inform while simultaneously shaping public attitudes [10; 15; 20]. The eight functions proposed above — nominative-evaluative, expressive-emotive, persuasive-argumentative, addressee-orientation, self-presentational, text-compressive, mitigating-euphemistic and cohesive-structuring — are not mutually exclusive but typically co-occur within a single phraseological occurrence, which is precisely what gives the phraseological sign its exceptional pragmatic efficiency in the language of politics. Further research might quantify the relative frequency of these functions across sub-genres of English political discourse (parliamentary debate, press interview, campaign speech, editorial commentary) and trace how phraseological transformation — occasional substitution, extension or fragmentation of a PU's component structure — is exploited for additional, contextually renewed pragmatic effect.

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