LEXICO-SEMANTIC MEANS OF MANIPULATION IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract: *This work presents a study of how manipulation is expressed in politics through language, as observed in English and French political discourse. Language units carefully selected by politicians in public speaking, in combination with social factors, can be a powerful instrument for manipulation, i.e. for managing public opinion. Manipulation is an integral part of political communication, all speech strategies of which are aimed at one purpose: to influence recipients, persuade them to make a decision beneficial for the speaker. The work considers the main strategies, tactics and types of manipulation used in modern political sphere. The analysis of politicians' public speeches highlights the pivotal role of manipulative speech techniques in achieving political objectives.*

Keywords: *political discourse, manipulation, lexical-grammatical characteristics, linguistic means, speech techniques*

Introduction

Politics is an integral part of societal life and one of the most effective tools to influence it. The solution to many domestic tasks is strongly influenced by the language used to present them to society. The influence of political communication on society and societal life is achieved through language (Gasparyan, 2018; Gasparyan, Hayrapetyan, 2020; Gasparyan, Harutyunyan, 2022). R. Blakar notes that one cannot be neutral while expressing oneself. Each use of language implies an impact. (Blakar, 1987, p. 92). Nowadays, problems related to language use within the framework of political communication are a frequent topic for

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discussions. As society's interest in politics is growing, so is the necessity for more in-depth studies of linguistic manipulation. New political conditions have led to changes in the methods of communicative influence but politics continues to be perceived as a means of struggle for power. Hence, in this case, one who manages to shape worldviews that serve their own interest, becomes the winner. The process of manipulation is primarily based on emotional components such as animosity, joy, fear, patriotism, etc. Influence is exercised through emotional components and is carried out at the level of language. The proper choice of vocabulary allows one to reach certain goals, e.g. to provoke anger or, on the contrary, increase the feeling of sympathy among the audience. It is just one step from emotions to action. Manipulation, in general, is exercised in speech, first and foremost, through elements of the lexical level. As V. E. Chernyavskaya notes, "the choice of a word, the choice of a nomination is now a subjective-evaluative action" (Chernyavskaya, 2006, p. 11). Besides the denotative meaning, words also have connotation, i.e. expressive-emotional-evaluative overtones through which the author of the message is able to convey their emotional stance on a fact, phenomenon or situation. (Chernyavskaya, 2006, p. 12). It is worthwhile to mention that the proper choice of words imposes on the recipient, sometimes very inconspicuously, a certain opinion and attitude toward the communicated information.

The practical part of this study is dedicated to the analysis of the linguistic tools of manipulation at various linguistic levels: lexical, semantic, syntactic, stylistic, and metapragmatic. The study draws on pre-election speeches, public addresses, and interviews by English- and French-speaking political figures. Pre-election discourse is selected due to its inherently persuasive nature, which seeks to elicit a strong emotional response from the audience and therefore clearly reveals strategies of manipulation, influence, and persuasion.

Methodology and Material

The analysis is conducted on the speeches of U.S. presidential candidates Joseph Biden and Donald Trump, as well as the speeches of French-speaking political figures, including former Presidents Nicolas Sarkozy, François Hollande, and the current President Emmanuel Macron. The study employs the method of taxonomic classification, and to achieve the stated aims and objectives, the method of lexical-semantic analysis is applied.

The concept of manipulation in linguistics

The term "manipulation" used to appear predominantly in the terminology of sciences involved in interpersonal relations studies. Today, manipulation is a

subject of study in philosophy, political science, psychology, journalism, linguistics and other scientific fields. Each of the disciplines listed above presents its own approach to the study.

Humans, as social creatures, constantly interact with other humans. Wherever there is any interaction, manipulative use can be encountered, and political communication is no exception. Manipulation implies an indirect control of people's consciousness, their beliefs (knowledge, opinions, ideologies) – and as a result – of their actions.

Manipulative processes were first described by German sociologist G. Franke who sees this concept as "psychological influence carried out secretly and, as a result, to the disadvantage of those at whom it is directed" (Franke, 1964, p. 362). An article by T. A. van Dijk, one of the first theorists of critical discourse analysis, is dedicated to the explanation of the concept of "manipulation" which is observed from three angles: as an abuse of power (social aspect), as control over consciousness (cognitive aspect), and as discursive interaction. The author emphasizes that these three aspects are equally important; none of them is more or less significant than the others. Van Dijk considers manipulation to be a process of communication and interaction where the addresser, i.e. the actor conducting manipulation, tries to take people under control, usually against their will and interests. These people are usually driven by the interests of a dominant group (van Dijk, 2006, p. 360). Moreover, manipulation signifies not just power but also the misuse of power. In other words, the speaker persuades others to believe or do things that benefit the manipulator and go against the interests of the manipulated (Martín Rojo, van Dijk, 1997).

It should be noted that there is no single, unified definition of manipulation. Different definitions can be found in different scholars' studies. However, the following basic characteristics of the phenomenon can be distinguished: the hidden nature of influence and disregard for the interests of the other side of communication, i.e., communication based on selfish reasons, regardless of addressee's will. (Goodin, 1980, pp. 7–23, Kolesnikova, 2011, p. 288). However, V. E. Chernyavskaya suggests a broader definition. The linguist defines it as linguistic influence aimed at the hidden, indirect encouragement of the recipient to perform certain actions. In this case, the speaker attempts to ensure that the recipient considers the statement true without examining arguments (Chernyavskaya, 2006, p.16).

As can be seen, the idea that manipulation is the verbal influence on the recipient of the communication is nearly universal in all the definitions listed above. According to T. Nikolayeva, the purposeful transformation of information is

a crucial component of manipulative influence (Nikolayeva, 1988). E. Sheygal, in his turn, distinguishes 2 types of manipulation which can be divided into subtypes depending on the nature of the transformation of information in political communication:

1. **Referential,** related to the transformation of the image of the referent in the process of designating reality. This refers to:

- factual manipulation which presupposes any alteration related to real facts: exaggeration, understatement, concealment, lie, etc.
- focal manipulation when the focal points of covering a fact, event, or statement are altered due to some specific considerations, thus prompting the recipient to perceive the situation from a perspective convenient to the manipulator.

2. **Argumentative** -The other type, in which, according to Sheygal the postulates of communication are violated. This covers cases when the logic of the development or integrity of the text is violated through avoiding direct responses, and intends to deviate from the subject matter proper or other specific interpretations. In this case the speaker intentionally hides evidence and presents the information in an incomplete manner (Sheygal, 2004, pp. 173–174).

Based on the mentioned theoretical approaches, we aim to examine the phenomenon of linguistic manipulation in political communication from the perspective of its lexical and semantic features. Research was conducted on election campaign speeches in both English and French.

Lexical-semantic means of verbal manipulation

In political communications, election campaign speeches are a vivid example of manipulation, which often occurs in media discourse. Certain manipulation techniques are more commonly observed in pre-election speeches, debates, and interviews. If we try to organize these techniques systematically, the following can be outlined:

1. Substitution of one word with another carrying the same emotional connotation. This technique has short-term effects and depends directly on the recipient's ability to analyze what they hear. Politicians often use word substitutions when they need to select a synonym with a similar meaning, especially when, at the moment of speaking, it has not yet taken on a negative connotation. This means that negative connotations should only arise after the recipient's subsequent analysis. Moreover, by employing this technique, the manipulator does not raise any suspicion of trying to influence the addressee's or

audience's consciousness, as they ostensibly refrain from using any negative vocabulary.

2. The interpretation and evaluation of events that have already happened, from a favorable perspective. It should be noted that this technique relates to argumentative manipulation proposed by Sheygal, where communication postulates are breached.

3. The imitation of abundance of information, which is considered a highly effective tool for shaping the audience's attitude toward various facts. Moreover, this information abundance is very often created by the politician through verbal repetition.

4. The sequence of message presentation in speech flow, where the main focus is on covering topics that are relevant to the audience or important to the manipulator. To provide effective influence on the interlocutor, politicians must organize their speech using specific semantic, stylistic, and semiotic forms. The hidden nature of influence is a key aspect of manipulation, and it is clear that this factor is crucial because the recipient should not suspect the speaker's intentions.

Lexical and semantic techniques are among the effective tools of verbal manipulation. This can be explained by the fact that words often carry connotative overtones, which evoke an emotional response from the interlocutor or audience. The analysis of the authentic materials shows that one of the commonly used techniques in the speeches and interviews of political figures is nominalization. This technique allows specific actions or concepts to be turned into more abstract and general ideas. Thus, the message is further expanded to become symbolic. Political figures often use the technique of nominalization to build a more persuasive and impactful speech.

Let us observe examples from English-speaking and French-speaking political figures' speeches.

> *And look, I've gotten more. I know all of these world leaders, even the one that we don't like very much, like Putin. I know him. He knows I know who he is, and he knows who I am. There's no misunderstanding about who we are. And it's really important.* (https://text.npr.org/785521659)

In the passage of his speech, Joe Biden emphasizes his understanding of how to effectively engage with leaders of other nations within the broader context of global political discourse. The nominalization of the verb to misunderstand *misunderstanding* by the political figure is intentional, and it allows him to make

the speech more expressive than it would have been if the simpler, verbal option *he understands who we are* had been used. Nominalization influences how a statement is perceived because it enables the speaker to conveniently omit active and important participants from the discussion, based on their own interests. Or vice versa, this flexible tool makes it possible to change the structure of the statement, if necessary, preserving the important component in the text.

The next passage is taken from former French President François Hollande's address delivered on 7 January 2015, following the armed attack on the editorial office of the satirical weekly "Charlie Hebdo."

> *Enfin, nous devons être nous-mêmes conscients que notre meilleure arme, c'est notre unité, l'unité de tous nos concitoyens face à cette épreuve. Rien ne peut nous diviser, rien ne doit nous opposer, rien ne doit nous séparer. Demain, je réunirai les présidents des deux assemblées ainsi que les forces représentées au Parlement pour montrer notre commune détermination.*
> (https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/193484-francois-hollande-07012015-attentat-au-siege-hebdomadaire-charlie-hebdo)

The use of the term *unité* emphasizes the concept of unity more strongly. Besides the nominalized form *unité*, Hollande also uses the verbal form in the same passage – *je réunirai les présidents* — employing a kind of repetition that avoids repeating the same nominalized element with identical semantic and emotional nuances.

Here is another example of the aforementioned technique employed in the same address:

> *Le rassemblement, le rassemblement de tous, sous toutes ses formes, voilà ce qui doit être notre réponse.*
> *Rassemblons-nous face à cette épreuve.* (https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/193484-francois-hollande-07012015-attentat-au-siege-hebdomadaire-charlie-hebdo)

In this excerpt, the nominalized element *rassemblement* and its denotative and connotative meanings enhance the emotional tone of the speech introduced by the word *unité* used in the previous passage. And here as well, the technique of repetition is used through the verbal construction *rassemblons-nous* alongside the nominalized lexical unit. In the aforementioned excerpts from both the English-

speaking and French-speaking political figures' speeches, another important technique characteristic of political communication is observed. That is the use of the deictic word *we*. Research indicates that in the pronominal system, discussions most frequently focus on the first-person plural pronoun *we*. Grammatically, the pronoun *we* includes *me* and *all others*. However, depending on the context and situation, the boundaries of *all others* may shift, including the interlocutor, individuals outside the communicative situation, or, conversely, excluding those listed (Kerbra-Orrechioni, 1999, pp. 201–210). We can find profound studies of the pronoun *we* in other works by C.Kerbrat-Orrechioni. The *superior we*, which is the simple replacement of *me*:

The *narrowly inclusive we,* which clearly replaces both sides of the communicative process—the *me* and the *you*

- The *broadly inclusive we,* which replaces the *me* and *all others,* regardless of whether they are included in the communicative process or not.
- The **exclusive we,** which includes *me* and any *other person,* with the exception of the interlocutor or the recipient of the message (Kerbra-Orrechioni, 1999, pp. 201–210; see also Kerbrat-Orrechioni, 1980.

In the previously discussed English example, nominalization occurs alongside the deictic *we***.** From a functional perspective, it motivates the audience to build a more trustworthy relationship with a political figure who identifies him/herself with their electorate. We can even observe that Biden's interview above demonstrates a negative evaluative stance towards the leaders of certain countries, and extends this stance to both his political allies and the U.S. citizens through the *broadly inclusive we* (we don't like).

In the French example, the use of the broad inclusive *nous* (we) can also be observed. President Hollande (former president) tends to consolidate entire France under the pronoun "nous" which is aimed to create a vision of national unity and solidarity in this context. This interpretation is supported by the psychological aftermath of a terrorist attack on the country: *Rien ne peut nous diviser, rien ne doit nous opposer, rien ne doit nous séparer* (Nothing can divide us, nothing should oppose us, nothing should separate us). In this extract, the repetition of the syntactic construction, which results in syntactic parallelism emphasizes the emotional overtones in the use of *nous*.

Our further analysis of the excerpt reveals yet another use of *nous*, this time in an imperative mood construction: *Rassemblons-nous face à cette épreuve* (Let's unite against this challenge). In French, the imperative form of pronominal verbs is formed with the post-positional use of the pronominal particle *se*, and in this case, the particle *nous* makes the president's appeal to the French people even more expressive.

In their speeches, political figures use lexical units that reflect the ideological values of the target audience or the society as a whole. The primary goal of such speeches is to influence public awareness. These lexical units are referred to as *ideologemes*. It is through such units that ideology is manifested in speech. Apart from their denotative meaning, these words carry ideological and sometimes even political markedness. The study of ideologemes is primarily conducted in works focusing on the social-political vocabulary and communication (Sheygal, 2004; Chudinov, 2006).

Let us look into examples of ideologemes in the following excerpt from Joe Biden's 2020 interview:

> *Freedom is about making sure that you care about the people you're around that they be free too. It's a patriotism to put this mask on.* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSAo_1mJg0g/)

As can be seen, the key elements in these two pieces of speech are the words with ideological connotations of *freedom* and *patriotism*.

The next example is from Donald Trump's 2020 interview:

> *I mean, the people with pre-existing conditions are going to be protected.* (https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/donald-trump-unedited-60-minutes-   interviewtranscript)

Donald Trump draws the public's attention to the importance of protecting people with health conditions and disabilities. The president emphasizes that he does not intend to leave such people to the whims of fate, and that *they will be protected***.**

The speech given by former French President Nicolas Sarkozy on 6 May 2007 after his victory in the presidential elections, deserves attention from the point of view of ideologemes.

> *Il n'y a pour moi ce soir qu'une seule victoire, celle de la démocratie, celle des valeurs qui nous unissent, celle de l'idéal qui nous rassemble.*
>
> *[…] Je veux réhabiliter le travail, l'autorité, la morale, le respect, le mérite***.** *Je veux remettre à l'honneur la nation et l'identité nationale. Je veux rendre aux Français la fierté d'être Français.*

> *[…] Le peuple français a choisi le changement. Ce changement je le mettrai en oeuvre parce que c'est le mandat que j'ai reçu du peuple et parce que la France en a besoin. Mais je le ferai avec tous les Français. Je le ferai dans un esprit d'union et de fraternité. Je le ferai sans que personne n'ait le sentiment d'être exclu, d'être laissé pour compte. Je le ferai avec la volonté que chacun puisse trouver sa place dans notre République, que chacun s'y sente reconnu et respecté dans sa dignité de citoyen et dans sa dignité d'homme.*
> (https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/166610-declaration-de-m-nicolas-sarkozy-de-lump-lannonce-de-so/)

As can be seen, the use of ideologemes is abundant in the excerpt, and this is supposed to immediately capture the attention of the audience. It appears that after his victory in the presidential elections, N. Sarkozy no longer feels the need to make promises, which is more typical of pre-election speeches. However, the reality is different. Based on the specific characteristics of national ideology, the president is not so much trying to make promises as he is attempting to create a vision that should be realized during his presidency. This vision is shaped by ideological words such as: *la démocratie* (democracy), *le travail* (work), *l'autorité* (authority), *la morale* (morality), *le respect* (respect), *le mérite* (merit)*, l'identité nationale* (national identity), *un esprit d'union* (spirit of unity), *fraternité* (brotherhood), *dignité de citoyen* (dignity of the citizen), *dignité d'homme* (human dignity).

The next lexical-semantic tool, particularly used in pre-election speeches or debates, is the use of vocabulary with emotional connotations that carry a positive markedness. It is typically used to present a bright and happy future to the electorate.

> *Plus I closed it very early from China, heavily infected, and even from Europe heavily infected, we've done a good job.*
> (https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/donald-trump-unedited-60-minutes-interviewtranscript)

In the excerpt, the positively charged vocabulary is used to give a positive evaluation of the actions taken by the Trump administration in the fight against the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

Emmanuel Macron's speech delivered on 7 December 2024, during the reopening of Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, grabs the attention with its use of

positively charged and emotionally marked words. Through his speech, the president aims to emphasize values such as unity, hope, and resilience.

> *Alors nous avons choisi le sursaut, la volonté, le cap de l'espérance. Nous avons décidé de rebâtir Notre-Dame de Paris plus belle encore, en cinq années. Le sursaut, la volonté. Et pour rendre cela possible, une fraternité inédite. Fraternité de ceux qui ont donné sur tous les continents, de toutes les religions, de toutes les fortunes. Unis par l'espérance, et réunis dans ces murs. Fraternité des compagnons, apprentis, et de tous les métiers, ici réunis.*
> (https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2024/12/07/ceremonie-de-reouverture-de-la-cathedrale-notre-dame-de-paris)

It can be noted that the reconstruction of the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris symbolizes the nation's revival for the speaker, as evidenced by the chosen lexical units: *sursaut* (rebound), *volonté* (will), *espérance* (hope), *rebâtir* (rebuild)**,** *fraternité* (brotherhood), *unis* (united). Thus, Macron mentions the fundamental values that have enabled France to overcome this and similar challenges.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of the lexical-semantic means of verbal manipulation reveals the intricate ways language can be used to influence perception, shape attitudes, and guide interpretation. Through mechanisms such as nominalization, repetition, use of ideologemes and vocabulary with emotional connotations speakers subtly alter meaning, mask intentions, or redirect attention. Studies show that language is the means through which political goals and ambitions are manifested. Through the political speeches and interviews analyzed in this article, it becomes clear that it is not enough to be familiar with the political figure's beliefs and ideology. It is also crucial to examine the linguistic tools and techniques used to manipulate, persuade, and present facts to the audience.

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Discours d'Emmanuel Macron lors de la cérémonie de réouverture de la cathédrale Notre-Dame de Paris.

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Ս. Գասպարյան, Ն. Այվազյան – *Մտահարկման բառա-իմաստաբանական միջոցները քաղաքական դիսկուրսում.* – Սույն աշխատանքը քննության է առնում մտահարկման արտահայտման ձևերը քաղաքականության մեջ։ Քննությունն իրականացվում է անգլալեզու և ֆրանսալեզու քաղաքական դիսկուրսում՝ լեզվի միջոցով։ Խնամքով ընտրված լեզվական միավորները, որոնք քաղաքական գործին օգտագործում է իր հանրային ելույթում, որոշակի սոցիալական գործոնների ազդեցությամբ, վեր են ածվում մտահարկման հզոր գործիքի՝ միտված հանրային կարծիքը կառավարելուն։ Մտահարկումը քաղաքական հաղորդակցության անբաժանելի մաս է, որի ռազմավարությունն ուղղված է մեկ նպատակի. ազդել հասցեատիրոջ վրա, համոզել նրան քաղաքական գործչի համար ձեռնտու որոշում կայացնել։ Աշխատանքում դիտարկվում են ժամանակակից քաղաքական ուղորտում կիրառվող հիմնական ռազմավարությունները և մտահարկման տեսակները։ Քաղաքական գործիչների հրապարակային ելույթների վերլուծությունը արդյունավետ միջոց է խոսքի մտահարկային տեխնիկայի բացահայտման համար:

Բանալի բառեր. *քաղաքական դիսկուրս, մտահարկում, բառ-քերականական հնարներ, լեզվական միջոցներ, խոսքային մարտավարություն*

С. Гаспарян, Н. Айвазян – *Лексико-семантические средства манипуляции в политическом дискурсе.* – В данной работе представлено исследование способов языкового выражения манипуляции в политическом дискурсе на материале английских и французских публичных выступлений. Отобранные языковые средства, используемые политиками в речевых актах, в сочетании с социальными факторами становятся мощным инструментом воздействия на общественное сознание, то есть средством управления общественным мнением. Манипуляция является неотъемлемым компонентом политической коммуникации. Все речевые стратегии манипуляции направлены на достижение одной цели – повлиять на адресата и убедить его принять решение, выгодное политику.

В работе рассматриваются основные стратегии, тактики и виды манипуляции, применяемые в современном политическом дискурсе. Анализ публичных выступлений политиков демонстрирует значимость манипулятивных речевых приемов для успешного достижения политических целей.

Ключевые слова: *политический дискурс, манипуляция, лексико-грамматические характеристики, языковые средства, дискурсивные приемы*