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THE MORPHO-SYNTACTIC ASPECT OF MEDIA POLITICAL DISCOURSE

Manipulation through different media platforms can immediately span practically every element of human life since it attracts, maintains and processes human attention very quickly. This unparalleled technical potential for propaganda and manipulation on social networks can be realized through different language means that may be utilized to influence others. In this paper, our main task will be to find out how manipulation in media is realized through the morpho-syntactic properties of language.

Key words: *manipulation, morpho-syntactic manipulation, propaganda, language of media, media-political discourse*

The study of media language from the morphological and syntactic perspectives would result in a wide range of distinctive linguistic features that would help us reveal cases of manipulation. Manipulation in different domains of media-political discourse has all the potential to be undertaken since every individual has an access to the world of modern media, newspapers and magazines, while speaking differently due to their social status and the domain in which they find themselves in the society.

The main provisions of what has been said before can be summarized as follows: the reporting format of the news differs from other forms of speech because there are certain basic restrictions on the use of language, including the requirements of time and space, which can be violated because the selection of grammar and vocabulary can be affected by human curiosity and motivation.

According to van Dijk, linguistic manipulation encompasses the grammatical, lexical, syntactic, pragmatic and, importantly, semantic aspects of language /van Dijk, 2006/. In *grammatical* manipulation the central emphasis is laid on the word order and the cohesion of the sentences, whereby it is possible to see what is emphasized in speech, how the words are used to manipulate the meanings. *Lexical and semantic* manipulation imply the functions of speech, namely metaphor, metonymy, etc. *Syntactic* manipulation is realized through the usage of modality, voice, nominalization, to name but a few. From a *pragmatic* perspective, the

manipulator usually communicates with the audience indirectly to covertly transmit information that is not present in his speech.

There are certain ways for people to manipulate others. M. Nordlund /Nordlund, 2003: 8-13/ gives a series of techniques of manipulation on the *syntactic level*. As part of syntactic manipulation, the use of the *active* and *passive voices* are taken into consideration. The *active* and *passive voices* play a very significant part in accounting for such occurrences. Depending, for example, on how to blame or praise someone, one can choose between an active or passive structure, or voice. The role of a participant can be emphasized, minimized or omitted entirely. To emphasize or minimize the role performed by a participant can also be called “foregrounding or backgrounding” /Beard, 2000: 30/. Active voice is chosen when focus on the actor is desired, implying responsibility for the action performed. Passive voice, on the other hand, gives the story a new orientation and creates a different effect. In transforming a sentence into the passive, the actor becomes less prominent and the person or thing affected by the action is focused /Nordlund, 2003: 9-10/.

On the basis of this, we will start our analysis with the following example “*Trump Calls Some Unauthorized Immigrants “Animals” in Rant*” /<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/16/us/politics/trump-undocumented-immigrants-animals.html/>.

Considering the headline as a sentence where the subject is “*Trump*” all of us will probably think of the former US president Donald Trump, and this can obviously lead us to the question, “Why do people recognize some politicians by their first names while others are known by their last names?” We are intended to share the same opinion with Brittney Deguara, that unwelcoming nicknames (names, last names, titles, designations) might have very different meanings and connotations /<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/122155920/why-are-some-politicians-known-by-their-first-name-others-by-their-surname/>. Being appealing, reassuring, and familiar, such nicknames might be seen as inappropriate, derogatory, disrespectful, or wrong. It is interesting to mention that if we view and consider this from the point of view of manipulation, we can say that referring someone having a political status by one’s first or even last name may sound less descent. This also leads to the importance of the manipulator’s intention. If we try to analyze this from the point of view of “Home court advantage” which is a tactic of psychological manipulation, we can view the article as the “home court” where the journalist (manipulator) feels more comfortable to show his/her confidence to talk to the target the way he/she wants without the simultaneous feedback of the victim (Donald Trump), for example no one can address Mr. Trump by his only first or last name during face-to-face interaction. The journalist, purposefully trying to be evasive, diverts the focus on “some more interesting facts” such as

“unauthorized immigrants are called “animals””. A special significance is attached to the predicate “*calls*” of the sentence. Here the choice of the present indefinite tense is not unintentional. Through this tactic the journalist tries to highlight that “calling unauthorized immigrants “animal” ” is a repeated and habitual action for Donald Trump, and this kind of feeling and attitude is not a subject to change.

Analogous with the subject and the predicate, the direct object “*some unauthorized immigrants animals*” followed by the adverbial modifier “*in rant*” also deserves consideration. In spite of the fact that Donald Trump has really called the immigrants “*animals*”, we can still see the manipulative intention of the journalist. The headline is very smartly chosen. It resembles the marketing tactic “digits to the left” just like the cases when people judge the price for the item that ends in 99 cents to be much lower than it in fact is (e.g., 5,99 dollars are, as a rule, perceived as 5 dollars instead of 6) /<https://www.ama.org/marketing-news/digits-to-the-left/>.

This strategy is implemented here through the use of the *active voice* where the responsibility and guilt is attributed to the subject of the sentence and remains in people’s subconscious minds (*Trump calls...*). It should be added in this connection that the adverbial modifier of manner “*in rant*” also creates an aggressive and hostile attitude towards the former US president. If we go back to the event where Donald Trump accused the undocumented immigrants saying “*you wouldn’t believe how bad these people are*”, “*these aren’t people, these are animals*” we can see that his behavior as well as the tone and pitch of his voice are exaggerated and manipulated through the choice of the adverbial “*in rant*” /<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CueIRYOpiA8/>.

There is no doubt that Donald Trump has been rude and verbally aggressive but there is some evidence to suggest information bias against the former president and manipulation of his speech since being undocumented or unauthorized to cross the borders of another country, the immigrants are supposed to be legally responsible. But if viewed from a different angle, the use of the passive voice in “*Some unauthorized immigrants are called “animals” by Trump in rant*” attaches significance to the illegal actions of immigrants too, as it is not Donald Trump’s sole responsibility or guilt. Thus, we can assume that the choice of the grammatical voice can largely condition the intensity of impact, therefore we should not exclude the probability of the manipulative potential. Trying to outline the origin and causes of the adverbial modifier of manner “*in rant*” in details, we refer to Merriam-Webster Dictionary and see that it means “a long angry speech or scolding” relating assault, attack, broadside, invective, etc. /<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rant/>. In journalism it is crucial and accepted to deliver the news as simple as possible for more availability to the audience, devoid of unnecessary and complex words and phrases. As far as “*in rant*” is concerned, it

could be much simpler and comprehensible if the choice of the author were “*in an angry manner*”. Let us look into another passage.

“President Trump lashed out at undocumented immigrants during a White House meeting on Wednesday, warning in front of news cameras that dangerous people were clamoring to breach the country’s borders and branding such people “animals.”

The participants of the main event in the passage are: *President Trump, undocumented immigrants, dangerous people*. A kind of gradation can be obviously observed in the choice of these nominative elements in the passage. On the other hand, it is apparent that the choice of the phrasal verb “*lashed out*” is not accidental since being a polysemantic verb it has the meanings “*to suddenly try to hit someone*” and “*to criticize someone in an angry way*” /https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/lash-out/. Critically analyzing word phrases and sentences used in this article such as “*dangerous people*”, “*racially fraud terms about immigrants*”, “*branding such people “animals”*” we can see that through these elements the journalist tries to manipulate and create a flowery language to sound cleverer and more intelligent. However, obvious is the fact that they sound ironic and disrespectful.

Regarding the so-called naming a politician by his first or last name only from a new angle we may however assume that such omissions besides having a probability to cover manipulation, are not necessarily deemed as an act of manipulation, for not having punctuation marks and other features typical to full-fledged sentences is usually considered an accepted style for headlines, in general, in case there are not more manipulation-related characteristics /Deguara, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/122155920/why-are-some-politicians-known-by-their-first-name-others-by-their-surname/>. In this context, the following example can be taken into consideration: “*Putin tells Macron Russia will reach aims through “negotiation or war”*” /https://www.panarmenian.net/eng/news/298874/?fbclid=IwAR23U9wp_YNuz3E6n3edARuPFC35RY0gKSm1I4yb-iaxwCpmw7GfyiwKtA0/. Morphologically, the headline predominantly consists of monomorphemic words with the sole exception of the word “*negotiation*”. Such a choice makes the target audience large, and this assumption is supported by a quick run through a readability tool: “Your directly input has an average reading ease of about 64.9 of 100. It should be easily understood by 13- to 14-year-olds” /Web FX Tools, <https://www.webfx.com/tools/read-able/check.php/>. One of the key tools journalists use to manipulate readers, in the largest sense of the word, is through reaching larger audiences, a task which we believe has been successfully accomplished in this case. At the same time, the authors have seemingly opted for

at least one higher-level word to avoid oversimplification. Thus, the word “negotiation” is not only the only affix-containing word in this headline, but it is also seen as a C1-level word by Cambridge Dictionary /<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/negotiation/>. If we try to rewrite the headline the way the typical, grammatically correct English sentence is supposed to be (“*Putin tells Macron that Russia will reach aims through “negotiation or war”*”) we observe the journalistic trick of linguistic economy principle. On the basis of this, the consideration of another example will be useful:

“Russian Prices Rising Fastest in 24 Years on Ruble Collapse”
[/https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/03/10/russian-prices-rising-fastest-in-24-years-on-ruble-collapse-a76858/](https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/03/10/russian-prices-rising-fastest-in-24-years-on-ruble-collapse-a76858/).

In the case of this headline, one may note incomplete verb forms, e.g., “Prices rising”. On the one hand, the absence of the auxiliary “are” in “Prices Rising” may be considered an omission and, on the other hand, it may be regarded as a verbal adjectivization in the sense that “Rising” has been chosen to describe Prices. If we are to be guided by the latter explanation, we should however bear in mind that in plain English syntax adjectives are not typically in post-position but rather in pre-position. Morphologically, the sentence is devoid of multiple-morpheme and complex forms, and it has minimized the usage of grammatical words, thus emphasizing the “journalistic principal economy of space” which, in its turn, leads to a greater focus around lexical words, hence, meaning. In that respect, the headline is catchy. We can also notice the use of the adjective “fast” in the superlative degree – “fastest”, which allows to observe that adjectives and adverbs can have a manipulative potential too, predominantly, when they are used in the comparative and superlative degrees of comparisons. To test the validity of this conception, let us take a look at the following sentence from the article referenced above: “Russian prices rising **fastest** in 24 years on ruble collapse”. If we transform the sentence in terms of the degrees of comparison, we can have: “Russian prices rising **faster** in 24 years on ruble collapse” and “Russian prices rising **fast** in 24 years on ruble collapse”. It may well be concluded that the higher the degree of comparison is, the better and stronger, more intriguing and propagating is the impact, leading the reader to a belief in the transmitted information. The same observation can be made in another example: “Imported goods such as cars, household appliances, televisions and smartphones have seen **the largest price** increases since the war started”; “Imported goods such as cars, household appliances, televisions and smartphones have seen **larger price** increases since the war started”; “Imported goods such as cars, household appliances, televisions and smartphones have seen **large price** increases since the

war started” /<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/03/10/russian-prices-rising-fastest-in-24-years-on-ruble-collapse-a76858/>.

As both examples show adjectives and adverbial expressions, such as “*rising fastest*”, “*fastest rate*”, “*largest increase in price*”, “*more than half its value*”, “*worst downturn*”, etc. can be one of those linguistic strategies employed by the journalist to create a magnetic article and manipulate the audience.

Magnetic and controversial topics are much illustrated in media, since they have a vast availability to reach greater audiences. It should be mentioned, that a lot of those media illustrations are the result of the political activities and events, and interestingly enough, as language and politics are inextricably linked, so are manipulation and media. In order to clarify the point, let us observe the following example:

“Missiles, rockets and accusations fly as Nagorno Karabakh flare-up burns into second week” (Melikyan et al, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/05/europe/azerbaijan-armenia-attacks-nagorno-karabakh-monday-intl/index.html>).

The central emphasis here is laid on a common grammatical pattern used in titles and headlines, i.e., the absence of the definite article prior to the expression “*second week*”. A case in point is also the usage of the two-morpheme noun “*flare-up*” which is verb-derived and collocates with the verb “*burn*”. Another feature in this headline is the usage of the two-morpheme preposition “*into*” instead of its monomorphemic analogue “*to*”, meant to emphasize the time phrase “*second week*.” Investigation of supplemental manipulation-related characteristics in the given example from a stylistic standpoint reveals a case of zeugma with the usage of the verb fly (*missiles and rockets can fly, so can accusations*). We believe that the authors’ choice of such a headline is conditioned with the intention to underline the metaphoric use of the word “*accusations*” (equally being a form of weapon). In addition, the lexicological analysis of this headline shows the prevalence of fire-related words, such as *missiles, rockets, flare-up* and *burn* constituting around 30% of the total number of words in the headline and 40% of the lexical elements. After taking all these facts into consideration it becomes possible to arrive at the conclusion that such a choice of headline targets a large audience making the readability 41.1 out of 100 for 16- to 17-year-olds to understand /<https://www.webfx.com/tools/read-able/check.php/>.

In the next example, which is entitled “*President’s visits to Turkiye – clear example of highest level of cooperation between two countries*” the author has grammatically minimized the usage of the articles, the auxiliary verb to be (*is a clear example, the highest level of cooperation*) applying the principle of linguistic

economy to focus on the lexical, semantic aspect of the sentence, thus creating an emotional appeal. Then, we may note, that the linking adverbials (*and, thus, but, that, etc.*) are used to make the sentences as explanatory and emotional as possible so that they have an impact on the readers. Let us consider the following paragraph:

“President Ilham Aliyev’s next working visit to Turkiye is a clear example of the highest level of personal friendship and cooperation between the two countries’ presidents. Fraternal relations between Turkiye and Azerbaijan are currently at the highest level under the leadership of Ilham Aliyev and Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Thus, the reciprocal official visits of the leaders are always greeted with great solemnity in both nations, and in each of these visits, close cooperation between the two friendly and brotherly countries in all areas is further strengthened,” MP, member of the board of the New Azerbaijan Party (NAP) Javid Osmanov told /Kazimoglu, <https://report.az/en/foreign-politics/president-s-visit-to-turkiye-clear-example-of-highest-level-of-cooperation-between-two-countries/>.

The manipulative intention of the journalist can be observed. Firstly, it is important to mention, that the paragraph is a direct quote, but what is interesting here, is that the sentences forming the paragraph are of manipulative nature whether employed intentionally or unintentionally, but the text and the context chosen by the journalist are obviously manipulative. Of special interest is the repetition of the synonymic patterns belonging to the same semantic field used in the article, such as *fraternal relations between Turkiye and Azerbaijan, leadership of Ilham Aliyev and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, two friendly and brotherly countries, close and eternal relations, brotherhood of Azerbaijan and Turkiye*. This high ethical code is an attempt to speak to the audience persuading them that the shared information is useful and valuable. Then, it is essential to emphasize the use of the word combinations and phrases such as *clear example, highest level of personal friendship and cooperation, great solemnity, etc.* via which the journalist’s biased attitude is realized, since mentioning the ethics and values, compassion, generosity between those two countries makes the listeners convinced by the two presidents and their activity, since the current fraternal cooperation is largely conditioned by the personal friendship of Ilham Aliyev and Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In a news writing, when reporting the current events, the choices of the verb tenses and adverbials acquire importance. The use of the present tense, for instance, describes events on a current plan /Biber, Conrad, 2009: 119/. The paragraph above, comprises the list of the following verbs used in the simple present tense: *is a clear example, are currently at the highest level, are always greeted with a solemnity in*

both nations, is further strengthened. We can also notice cases of overstatement, realized through the adverbial element “*always*”, which however does not avail a possibility of generalizations on the basis of one concrete visit.

On September 12th, BBC News reported: “*Labor leadership: “political earthquake” if Jeremy Corbin wins*” /<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-politics-34231718/>.

The choice of the journalist to write a headline of this kind is quite interesting for consideration. First of all, the headline consists of the following three parts: *labor leadership, political earthquake, and if Jeremy Corbin wins*, each of which is separated by a punctuation mark. Punctuation marks are pauses or gestures used to clarify the meaning of the words. They are signals to the reader, indicating a pause, emphasis, altering the function or showing the relationship between the elements of the text /Jane, 2014/. In the given headline we notice the use of a *colon (:)*, which indicates the explanation of what precedes it. In our example, the colon is used in a direct quote, and the reported element *political earthquake* which is a metaphor in quotation marks (‘’), seems to be the central message of the news article, hence its placement in the center of the headline is not accidental. This metaphoric conceptualization, figuratively used in the headline is an implied comparison which is emphasized by the journalist to describe the situation in a more captivating and promising manner. But it is also worth mentioning that following the punctuation marks the reader needs to pause before considering the last part of the headline which is a hypothetical conditional sentence (*if Jeremy Corbin wins*). We can assume that the pause after the quotation mark intensifies the conditionality. In conclusion we can say, that if Jeremy Corbin does not win, whatever has been written can be nonsense. Thus, the lack of logic here is obvious.

We are now setting out to analyze another example taken from Politico, a political journalism company, where the article is headlined rhetorically: “*What the hell does Emmanuel Macron think he’s playing at with Vladimir Putin?*” /Caulcutt, <https://www.politico.eu/article/macron-putins-last-open-line-to-the-west/>. The headline is a question, which, as a linguistic feature, is of rare occurrence in news articles. The author uses a rhetorical question in the headline which apparently is an intentional choice of irony because the article is obviously criticizing the actions of Emmanuel Macron in the meantime with no intention to justify Vladimir Putin’s actions, e.g., “*the Russian leader that has continued even as Russian troops carry out a brutal assault on Ukraine*”, “*A couple of weeks later, Russia launched its invasion*”, “*Russian forces were mounting an assault on Europe’s largest nuclear plant at Zaporizhzhia*”, etc. Regarding the headline of the article, which has both a very intriguing and a propagating content, the reader’s attention is first of all drawn to the expression “*what the hell*”, which is an exclamation having different connotative overtones, the most commonly used of which are surprise, anger or

shock (Urban dictionary...). What is vivid is that the author's subjective opinion and attitude are realized through the question, which is a sign of preconception. The headline is apparently ironic since the denotational meaning of the sentence does not correlate with the contextual meaning of the utterance, "*What the hell does Emmanuel Macron think...?*" does not implicate that the other side (Putin) is right in his actions, but it actually blames Emmanuel Macron for his "soft" and "non-influential" behavior ("*where he sat at a very long table and tried to convince Putin to show restraint*"). At the same time, we can see the following sentences: "**Macron may have managed to keep a line of communication open. What he hasn't been able to do is demonstrate any sign of having influenced Putin's behavior**", where the author has used the modal verb "may" in the present perfect tense to express a hypothetical possibility. We again encounter here a lack of logic (logos), while the choice of the predicate "*hasn't been able to do*" is to make the criticism more to the point enhancing the idea that Emmanuel Macron does not have that ability and power to change anything in Vladimir Putin's actions.

As can be seen from the analysis of the examples, the purpose of which was to bring out the morphological and syntactic properties of the news articles with their potential to manipulate, in media-political discourse there is an abundant use of language means that can be tools of language manipulation depending on the situation and context. Normally, people concentrate on the lexical level of the language while reading articles, paying attention to the vocabulary used, but through critical thinking and analysis we understand that grammatical patterns can also largely condition the conceptual and contextual message. Different morphological and syntactic properties of the language, such as the active and passive voices, hypothetical conditional sentences, degrees of comparison of adjectives, tense forms, etc. can be used when the journalist has the intention to manipulate.

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Ս. ԴԱՍՅԱՆ, Ր. ԱՐՄԵՆՅԱՆ – *Մորֆո-սինտակտիկական ասպեկտ մեդիապոլիտիկական քննարկի.* – Манипулирование с помощью различных медиаплатформ может мгновенно охватить практически все элементы человеческой жизни, поскольку оно очень быстро привлекает, удерживает и обрабатывает внимание человека. Этот беспрецедентный технический потенциал для пропаганды и манипуляции в социальных сетях может быть реализован с помощью различных языковых средств, которые могут быть использованы для воздействия на других людей. В данной работе нашей основной задачей является выяснение того, как манипуляция в СМИ реализуется через морфо-синтаксические свойства языка.

Կարևոր բառեր: манипуляция, морфо-синтаксическая манипуляция, пропаганда, язык СМИ, медиа-политический дискурс

Ս. ԳԱՍՊԱՐՅԱՆ, Ռ. ՀԱՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՅԱՆ – Մեդիա-քաղաքական դիսկուրսի ձևաբանական-շարահյուսական հայեցակերպը. – Տարբեր մեդիա հարթակների միջոցով մտաշահարկումը կարող է տարածվել մարդկային կյանքի գրեթե բոլոր ոլորտներում, քանի որ այն շատ արագ գրավում է մարդկանց ուշադրությունը, կառավարում և ազդում նրանց մտածողության վրա: Սոցիալական ցանցերում պրոպագանդայի և մտաշահարկման այս անհամեմատելի տեխնիկական ներուժը կարող է իրացվել տարբեր լեզվական միջոցների կիրառմամբ, որոնք միտված են ազդեցություն գործելու մարդկանց վրա և ուղղորդելու նրանց գործողությունները: Այս հոդվածում մեր հիմնական խնդիրն է պարզել, թե ինչպես է զանգվածային լրատվության ոլորտում մտաշահարկում իրականացվում լեզվի ձևաբանական և շարահյուսական միջոցներով:

Բանալի բառեր. մանիպուլյացիա, ձևաբանական-շարահյուսական մանիպուլյացիա, պրոպագանդա, լրատվամիջոցների լեզու, մեդիա-քաղաքական դիսկուրս

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