

RESEMANTIZATION OF VLADIMIR PUTIN'S PRECEDENT STATEMENTS IN THE RUSSIAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract: This paper aims to analyse updated precedent statements of Vladimir Putin with an accent on their resemantization. The updating often takes place using a purposeful alteration of some part of the expression, as well as of the whole expression. I use the method of critical discourse analysis to characterize the social and political context of the expressions, as well as the discourse strategies targeting the addressees of the analysed speech fragments. Analyzed are Putin's statements "Ukrainians and Russians are one nation" and "Special military operation". Analyzing his speech, I select expressions which are precedent or have the ambition to become precedent for Russian linguocultural society. I focus both on analysing the dominant functions of selected updates and on their potential to influence the Russian language's image of the world and on the transformation of these fragments of the Russian political discourse. The analysis is carried out at the interface of political linguistics, linguoculturology, and cognitive linguistics. The main source of updated expressions is social media Twitter. The analysis was carried out between May 2019 and October 2022. This source of information cannot be separated from research on political discourse. Social networks as a platform for research on political discourse is very important, as the information is always current and reaches a large number of users.

Keywords: precedent phenomenon, precedent statement, resemantization, political discourse, linguocultural society

Current research in political linguistics is often devoted to the analysis of figurative or non-standard expressions of top politicians. The popular expressions of the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, are no exception. At the same time, it is an attempt to "analyse their consistent appearance

in mass media in terms of communicative strategies of their use within the discourse opposition of their 'Ours' and 'Theirs' on the imaginary axis of the pro-Putin coalition versus anti-Putin opposition" (Dulebová, 2016). For years, President Putin has been building an image of a strong ruler who, however, tries to get closer to "his people" with his speeches, including in such a way that he is not afraid to use slang expressions or jargons in his speeches. We see the importance of research in this area of political linguistics precisely in the fact that the President of the Russian Federation is "setting a stylistic trend" and expanding the boundaries of what is permissible in contemporary Russian political communication. This significantly changes the previously established lexical norms of journalistic (media) texts (Gajarský, 2015).

Precedent phenomena

The precedent phenomena, being a vital component of any culture, are most widely represented in the language of mass media, the most important communication environment of modern society. Today, the media offer a certain picture in which the world is not reflected but interpreted. Thus, precedent phenomena/precedent units occupy a special place in the media reality as a product of mass media information activity and transmit both traditional and newly created cultural values.

Initially, in Russian linguistics, Karaulov (1987) introduced a concept of precedent text, which was defined as a text 1) stored in the mind of a native speaker of a particular language community; 2) representing a cultural fact significant for a linguistic identity; 3) repeatedly updated in the discourse of a linguistic identity (Karaulov, 2010).

There are four types of precedent phenomena: precedent text, precedent statement, precedent situation, and precedent name. The traditional classification of precedent phenomena based on their aspectual identity was suggested by Gudkov (2003) and Krasnykh (2002); they distinguish four kinds of precedent phenomena depending on what is mentioned a phrase from a literary work, history, or politics; a date, a place of the event, or a key personality.

Vladimir Putin is known to use aggressive language units; often his lexis is "reduced" and expressive. He uses a large number of jargons. Although Putin's statements often become very popular, not all of his statements or expressions have the potential to become precedents. Several factors influence this. Probably the most important of them is the response in the media, their wide resonance in the mass media space. This is not only about the president's expressions themselves, but about the discursive intentions of their use by other actors of political communication. Putin's statements are modified (by social network users or commentators, generally people who talk/write about

politics) in various ways – they are updated through the shift of denotation, modification of connotative meaning, transformation, or resemantization. "The resemantization process is a sort of transfer of meaning or change of sense, that is, the meaning of things is transferred or changed to produce new meanings." (Barroso, 2017, p. 344).

In this paper, we analyse the types of transformation of precedent statements. I use the theory of D. Gudkov (2003) described the following four ways of transformation of precedent phenomena: exchange of components (substitution); omission of components (implication); the addition of components (explication); and combination of two or more precedent phenomena (contamination).

The main task of using transformations is to capture the attention of the audience. Recalling a familiar situation, the previous text because of the transformation of some components leads to the emergence of new meanings, and an increase in expressiveness. According to A. Orekhov (2014), the purpose of using precedent phenomena is not their literal meaning but the associations that arise when all extralinguistic contexts are correctly understood.

So, the analysis is focused on updated Putin's expressions on social media Twitter. I selected several examples in which social media users referred to Putin's words. The purpose of using updated phrases is for my research very important because by analysing new meanings, we can uncover the discourse strategies. The best way to analyse these discourse elements is by defining main functions of communication. Precedent phenomena are attributed to certain functions on the basis of which we can interpret their communicative intention. These functions are persuasive, cognitive, euphemistic, modelling, pragmatic, communicative, expressive, nominative, evaluative, consolidating, identifying, encoding, or language game function (Cingerová & Dulebová, 2019).

"Ukrainians and Russians are one nation"

This statement Vladimir Putin has made several times. First, in 2015, during the President's visit to Crimea, he spoke about one nation. Later that year, he claimed that on the television program "Direct Line with Vladimir Putin". In July 2021, he wrote an essay "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians", where he claimed that Ukrainians and Russians are one nation. Even in March 2022 during a meeting of the Russian Federation Security Council (at the time of the invasion of Russian troops into Ukraine), he said this statement. Each time, the phrase provoked strong emotions and a great deal of commentary in political and media discourse. In Russian society, this phrase was updated as follows:

"Ukrainians and Russians are one nation and another nation. The phrase is simply unfinished" (MoonRiver, 2019). The author has created an updated version using explication (addition of components 'and other people', and 'The phrase is simply unfinished'). The irony is present and changes the meaning of the original phrase to the opposite. By changing the meaning of the statement, the author expresses disagreement with the original statement. I attribute the update to an evaluative and persuasive function because of the author's purpose to judge and present his attitude. One may see there also an effort to form ideas about the surrounding world in the shape of a certain model "two nations, not just one" (modelling function). Finally, I attribute the euphemistic function because, by resemantization, the author tries to soften the essence of what is said, to express the information less aggressively.

"Maybe Putin is right when he says that Ukrainians and Russians are one nation. Because Ukrainians are a nation and Russians are not!" (Tyoty Roza, 2022). This update is created by explication (the addition of components, 'Maybe Putin is right when he says that, and 'Because Ukrainians are a nation and Russians are not!'). The author expresses contempt for the enemy. The meaning of the original statement is changed. The expressive function prevails. The author comments on the original statement in a very expressive way in an effort to evaluate (negatively) the statement of the President. Using resemantization, he tries to affect the recipient (persuasive function) – when it comes to political discourse, one of the main functions is to persuade potential voters. The author also offers us a kind of model situation for interpreting reality – Ukrainians are a nation, but Russians are not.

"Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians – one nation. And our government, another nation" (Kartinkof.club, 2022). This update is made of the explained components 'Belarusians' and 'our government, another nation,' by which the meaning of the sentence is completely different. The author points out that people and government are two distinct entities. The new semantics is expressive and has an emotional impact on the recipient.

"Special military operation"

On 24 February 2022 Vladimir Putin made a televised speech and declared a "special military operation", i.e., Russia militarily invaded Ukraine. In his speech, he explains the motives and goals of the invasion. His speech was sharply criticized by the world's public for the absence of facts and the presence of manipulation and lies. The term 'special military operation' used is highly euphemistic, as it replaces the word 'war'.

Perhaps the most viral update was the substitution of 'special military operation' for 'war' in connection with the novel of Tolstoy 'War and peace'. In

this update, there is a substitution as a form of transformation. We can assume that it was due to the humorous combination of a modern euphemistic term with the title of an iconic Russian novel that the update (Special military operation and peace) became very popular. After all, it went viral even beyond the borders of Russian space. The same tendency of altering Tolstoy's novel also appeared in the Slovak environment. In this way of updating Putin's expression, the authors used irony to express their opinion about the true nature of the statement, i.e., that it is not some special military operation, but a regular war conflict (modelling function). Through a clear and deliberate euphemism, the authors try to influence the opinion of the receiver in a parodic way (entertaining, euphemistic, and persuasive function).

"Dear Russian friends! These are not sanctions, but a special financial operation. The world is trying to save you" (A_Blek, 2022). In this case, there is a modification of the expression, the addition of components (explication) and the substitution of the adjective 'military' for 'financial'. This modification has changed the meaning. The author of the update is trying to provoke a primarily laughing reaction (an entertainment function, in this case, political satire). By changing the adjective, he is trying to influence the recipient's opinion by pointing to another example of a 'special operation' while at the same time pointing out that this is not a euphemism (function: dysphemism).

"That is not a dismissal, but a release from work" (Alburov, 2022). This update has a new meaning, but still refers to the original Putin expression. It is a very similar case as in the previous example. The modification is made of substitution of 'war' for 'dismissal' and of 'special military operation' to 'release from work'. The author applies Putin's statement to another example to uncover the meaning: Putin lies and tries in a euphemistic way to manipulate people's thinking. The function of the update is dysphemistic and modelling because there is an obvious effort to build a model of thinking about the true functioning of the world.

"Special military operation codenamed tsap-tsarap" (LGBT se-instruktor iz NATO, 2022). The modification is made of additional components "code-named tsap-tsarap". The expression 'tsap-tsarap' means *to grab very quickly or steal playfully*. This expression is common to most Russians because it was the headline of an old Russian cartoon. But another meaning has retrieved in November 2019, when Vladimir Putin said on television the following: "As for shale oil, let us wait for the Americans to spend money on new technologies for shale oil production, and then they 'tsap-tsarap' - see if we are even interested in it today or not - and buy it for cheap", after the speech he claimed that he was joking. This phrase is already notoriously familiar to Russian linguocultural society and has strong negative connotations. So, this update is made of contamination of two precedent expressions ('special military operation' and 'tsap-tsarap'). Such a combination of two familiar phrases suggests

that the update will have an impact on the recipient and can spread more easily and quickly. The function of the update is unencoding and pragmatic. The code is hidden in both precedent units and only for some linguocultural societies is understood.

Conclusions

The main purpose of resemantizing Putin's expressions was to evaluate his statements. The authors of these updates (social media users) did it mainly negatively. By using modification through the change of meaning, the authors tried to show the true essence of Putin's statements. Through their updates, they offered a possible model situation through which to view the world (and the complex meaning of Putin's statements).

The precedent expressions were actualized in the spirit of ironic resemantization and mostly in an expressive way. This may have contributed to its rapid memorization and permanent anchoring in the Russian linguocultural society. Such dissemination and actualisation of Putin's expressions may negatively affect the Russian linguistic image of the world and the vector of the direction of the Russian political discourse in the sense of the growth of its radicalization and aggressiveness.

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