

MANIPULATIVE TACTICS IN MODERN ENGLISH- LANGUAGE MEDIA DISCOURSE: LINGUISTIC, PRAGMATIC AND EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

*TÁTICAS DE MANIPULAÇÃO NO DISCURSO DA MÍDIA DE
LÍNGUA INGLESA MODERNA: ABORDAGEM LINGUÍSTICA,
PRAGMÁTICA E EDUCACIONAL*

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ABSTRACT

The relevance of the chosen research topic is dictated by the need to describe manipulative tactics in modern English-language media discourse, taking into account both the cognitive mechanisms involved in it, which represent the basis of mental activity, and the communicative aspects of influencing a wide audience. It is shown that manipulation implies the choice and use of linguistic means that allow having a hidden effect on the addressee. Manipulative influence is considered as a leading discursive practice, which is a complex of strategic and tactical components aimed at shaping public opinion within the media space.

Keywords: Media discourse. Media communications. Media text. Linguistic pragmatic approach. Linguistic and cultural approach. Educational approach. Lexical means. Linguistic means. Manipulation Technologies. Semantics.

RESUMO

A relevância do tema de pesquisa escolhido é ditada pela necessidade de descrever as táticas de manipulação no discurso moderno da mídia de língua inglesa, levando em conta tanto os mecanismos cognitivos envolvidos, que representam a base da atividade mental, quanto os aspectos comunicativos de influenciar uma pessoa. Grande audiência. Mostra-se que a manipulação implica a escolha e utilização de meios linguísticos que permitam ter um efeito oculto sobre o destinatário. A influência manipulativa é considerada uma prática discursiva líder, que é um complexo de componentes estratégicos e táticos destinados a moldar a opinião pública no espaço da mídia.

Palavras-chave: Discurso mediático. Comunicação mediática. Texto mediático. Abordagem linguística pragmática. Abordagem linguística e cultural. Abordagem educacional. Meios lexicais. Meios linguísticos. Tecnologias de manipulação. Semântica.

Introduction

Today, linguistics is developing in such a way that research aimed at solving applied problems is relevant, and in the light of the actualization of applied aspects, problems associated with the use and use of language, including the use of language for manipulative purposes, are gaining popularity. In the last two decades, interest in manipulation as a leading discursive practice in linguistic studies has increased markedly, which is explained by the steadily increasing role of the media in shaping the domestic political agenda of states. Against the background of exponentially growing interest in manipulative technologies, there is an expansion of the range of new information carriers and communication tools, a modification of traditional channels of communication is taking place, an arsenal of technological solutions is constantly being improved, the implementation of which leads to the emergence of

a communicative product a traditional or increasingly multimodal media text (Siuta et al. , 2021). The digital revolution dictates the need to study manipulative strategies in close connection with polycode, intertextuality, and the digital environment of the "habitat" of texts, because the Digital media space is an ideal environment for realizing the intention to influence the public consciousness, where social networks play a special role, which today play the role of new media (Mialkowska et al., 2023). They actually move into the status of a regulator of public opinion, "the public is creating the illusion of voluntarily accepting the stated opinion ... realizing the need to perform certain actions expected by the manipulator" (Zienkowski et al., 2011).

The relevance of the stated problems is also due to the fact that in the context of globalization with the dominant role of the English language in the media space, the study of manipulative strategies of English-language discourse (primarily political) is of particular importance both for effective intercultural interaction and for identifying and eliminating the risk of social tension in a multicultural society.

Method

The information base of this study was English-language articles from electronic resources of the British and American media: BBC, CNN, The Guardian, The Independent, The New York Times, The Washington Post, publications on social networks Twitter and Facebook.

To achieve the set goals and objectives, the following methods were used: classification, generalization, cognitive-semantic modeling, quantitative data processing, component analysis, stylistic analysis. Among the methods applied, there are general scientific methods such as observation and comparison, and such special linguistic methods as the semantic and pragmatic interpretation of the meaning of discourse, the presuppositively-contextual method, the intentional method and the method of definitional analysis.

Results and Discussion

The traditional understanding of manipulation as a type of psychological influence that “leads to the hidden arousal in another person of intentions that do not coincide with their existing desires” (Cull, 2013) has expanded after research by T. Van Dijk, (1996), where manipulation is seen as “discursive social practice of dominant groups aimed at the reproduction of their power. Such a broad understanding of manipulation also implies a variety of approaches to the study of this phenomenon: either in order to study the abuse of power (social aspect), or to study control over consciousness (cognitive aspect), or from the linguistic positions of a discursive-semiotic phenomenon.

Language manipulation techniques can occur on the phonetic (correlation of sounds, colors and content), lexical-semantic (polysemantic words, indirect meaning, blurred boundaries, specific nominative act, specific connotative semantic components), syntactic (passive voice, incentive constructions, modal verbs, conjunctions “and” and “but”, attributive constructions, rhetorical questions, appeals, repetitions, homogeneous members of a sentence, deixis) and stylistic (metaphor, metonymy, antithesis, nominalization, clichés, ideologemes, modal predicates, words with non-specific semantics) levels.

In this regard, the linguistic description introduces the concept of linguistic manipulation as a kind of “manipulative influence, carried out by the skillful use of certain language resources with the aim of covertly influencing the cognitive and behavioral activity of the addressee” (Kuzio, 2014), which is being replaced in modern media linguistics, in linguistic pragmatic approach, linguistic and cultural approach, by the concept of multimodal manipulation as an interaction through which a tendentiously deliberate, interested, veiled influence on the actions of the subject is achieved, carried out in some cases also in the interests of third parties (Kuzmenko et al., 2023). Any discursive strategy that “reactivates the recipient’s preferred cognitive models” (Matz et al., 2017) can be transformed into a manipulative one.

A number of basic characteristics of manipulation are distinguished. First of all, it is the relationship of subject and object, or manipulating and manipulated. The actors of manipulation are people who have access to any form of public discourse: politicians, journalists, scientists, writers, marketers, bloggers and other specialists in creating media content on social networks. Note that today the so-called "opinion leaders" and influencers have a special manipulative potential.

The object of manipulation is the representatives of a certain social group. It is noteworthy that the manipulation is not addressed to a specific person, but to social groups and is aimed at reaching an ever larger audience. At the same time, in order to successfully achieve the goal, the actor has a clear idea of the target group and chooses manipulative strategies in accordance with this knowledge. The actor controls the relation of the object to the phenomena of the surrounding world in the direction necessary for him and achieves his goal thanks, among other things, to the object of manipulation itself.

In the course of manipulation, information is deliberately distorted to one degree or another, there is a dominance of the expression of opinions over the transmission of facts. The transmission channel of such information is often multimodal.

It seems possible to conditionally divide manipulative discursive strategies according to the degree of information distortion into strategies of factual manipulation and strategies of ideological polarization.

Factual manipulation is characterized by the deliberate concealment and distortion of information, the introduction of false information, obscuring unwanted information, changing the focus of coverage of an event and is implemented through strategies such as fake, disinformation and propaganda. Note that "the term "fake" is not applicable to a value judgment. "A person has the right to any, including an erroneous assessment, therefore a direct expression of an assessment should be evaluated not as a fact, but as an opinion" (Mintz, 2012).

"Propaganda" is understood as modern "political-rhetorical activity organized by the state and used to control the behavior of the masses through a

symbolic impact on the emotional-evaluative sphere and worldview of the mass addressee” (Chester & Montgomery, 2017). Propaganda is distinguished by a high degree of informational aggression.

However, it should be noted that both fakes and propaganda are largely a response to demand from the object of manipulation. People “prefer information that is consistent with their political views or their picture of the world”, which is due to the tendency to stereotype thinking and the inability to critically analyze the situation (Woolley & Howard, 2018). The reason for the popularity and effectiveness of a fake as a means of manipulation should also be sought in the recipient's desire to avoid cognitive dissonance. If the media discourse ceases to appeal to the stereotypical knowledge shared by all carriers of the respective subculture, this dissonance will inevitably set in.

The second manipulative strategy ideological polarization is implemented through the creation of cognitive models that make the recipient feel more strongly that they belong to “their own” and reject “strangers”. The goals of polarization are a positive presentation of “Self / Us” and a negative presentation of “Other / Them”, pedaling ideological affiliation and ideological conflict. The achievement of the effect in both cases occurs through the implementation of macro strategies of legitimation and discrediting.

It should also be noted that tactics should be understood as a certain speech course necessary for the implementation of a speech strategy. In addition, this term also represents a speech action (one or more speech acts), correlated with a certain stage in the implementation of a speech strategy and aimed at performing particular communicative tasks of this stage. The communicative goal can be achieved in the process of implementing several speech tactics (Mialkowska et al., 2023). Thus, we can say that tactics in communication are used to divide the process of speech influence into certain moves and stages, which are also independent processes and elements of a single whole. Strategies and tactics are close in their content, but at the same time they are characterized by distinctive features. They are a whole, divided into components. For the implementation of tactics, certain methods of a

lower order are also needed, which have one common goal. Such techniques are called communication moves.

The tactic of denunciation in order to convict an opponent consists in bringing arguments that make his guilt proven - statistical data and quotations from the speeches of the opponent himself. So, for example, in a debate with D. Trump, Joe Biden backs up his statement about President Trump's responsibility for the deaths of people (responsible for many deaths) with official statistics on deaths from coronavirus in the United States. Accusing him of non-compliance with epidemiological measures (he's been totally irresponsible, he's a fool on this), he appeals to the words of Trump himself that hundreds of people attended his meetings with voters. Thus, Biden's accusations ("He's been totally irresponsible", "who's responsible for that many deaths", "He's a fool on this", "He's not worried about the people"), are based on objective information statistics and evidence of the opponent:

Biden blames Trump for 200,000 US coronavirus deaths in explosive presidential debate. "Anyone who's responsible for that many deaths should not remain president of the United States of America," he said. While Mr Trump boasted that thousands of people have attended his political rallies in recent months, Mr Biden said that was a black mark on the president's record, putting people's lives at risk. "He's been totally irresponsible the way in which he's handled the social distancing and people wearing masks, basically encouraging them not to. He's a fool on this. He's not worried about the people," Mr Biden said (The Independent)

During the 2016 presidential debate, H. Clinton denounced D. Trump, putting forward as an argument a quote from his speech proving his involvement in the mortgage crisis. She refers both to statistics (nine million people lost their jobs, five million people lost their homes, families lost \$13 trillion in income) and appeals to Trump's 2006 quote:

In fact, Donald was one of the people who rooted for the housing crisis. He said, back in 2006, "Gee, I hope it does collapse, because then I can go in and buy some and make some money". Well, it did collapse. Nine million people - nine million people lost their jobs. Five million people lost their homes. And \$13 trillion in family wealth was wiped out (The New York Times).

Another tactic threats is to whip up fear, creating the effect of the inevitability of negative consequences. So, in his Twitter message, D. Trump not only declares the threat of obstruction of justice if Biden comes to power, but also creates the maximum effect of the tragedy with the help of lexical reduplication *killers kill it all* with the effect of irreversibility of what is happening. Accusing opponents of espionage and treason (spying, treason & more), the speaker also cultivates fear among the objects of his manipulation if D. Biden comes to power:

If Biden gets in, nothing will happen to Hunter or Joe. Barr will do nothing, and the new group of partisan killers coming in will quickly kill it all. Same thing with Durham. We caught them cold, spying, treason & more (the hard part), but "Justice" took too long (Tweeter).

All of the above tactics are designed to discredit the speaker's opponents. However, the maximum manipulative impact on the audience is achieved not by individual tactical decisions, but by combining several tactics and strategies in one statement, which creates a "three-dimensional" effect and leads to even greater ideological polarization and the strengthening of the "friend or foe" dichotomy. Often different strategies are implemented through the same language means.

There is, in particular, a tactic for creating the emotional mood of the addressee, created through rhetorical questions, emotional vocabulary, various repetitions, euphemisms and gradation. This tactic allows setting the pumping effect of the transmitted message.

The issues of studying the manipulative tactics and technologies of discourse, as one of the ones that have the greatest impact on public opinion, as well as highlighting the corresponding pragmatolinguistic features, are brought to the fore in modern conditions. So, for example, from a pragmatic point of view, in political discourse, the speech impact on the addressee occurs through the use of certain strategies and tactics, in this regard, it is necessary to study these phenomena and their classification in political discourse.

For manipulative purposes, integration tactics are also widely used, for the expression of which emotional lexical units, lexical and syntactic repetitions,

gradation, oppositions, rhetorical questions, non-union connection, pronouns “we”, “you”, “us”, “your”, “our”. This tactic has as its derivatives the tactic of unity, which allows uniting the speaker and the people, as well as the tactic of addressing the emotional sphere of the recipient, that enables creating inspired pathos (Atamali, 2021).

It should be emphasized that from a pragmatic point of view, the manipulation of public opinion occurs with the help of strategies and tactics, which, in turn, are expressed by linguistic means. A strategy is understood as some super-task, which is set by the addresser and which is aimed at achieving a communicative or practical goal, which is to influence the recipient and achieve a perlocutionary effect (Bounchnak, 2015). Tactics, in turn, is a speech action that is used to solve one of the tasks within the framework of a certain strategy.

In particular, one of the lexical means in the studied pre-election interviews is nominalization, i.e. transition of a part of speech into a noun. This tool in the studied examples is responsible for procedurality.

And look, I've gotten more. I know all of these world leaders, even the ones 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 (NPR's Full Interview With Joe Biden).

In this example, Joe Biden discusses world politics and emphasizes that he understands how best to deal with other leaders of states. The nominalization of the verb to misunderstand (misunderstanding) has a certain contextual meaning. The deliberate replacement of the grammatical form by the politician allows him to give the phrase more expressiveness (compared to the simpler version of the expression of the same thought, he understands who we are). From a pragmatic point of view, nominalization, used in this case together with deixis (*we*), disposes the audience to build more trusting relationships with a politician who identifies himself with the people and contrasts “his” with “them”, which is a very frequent motive for political speeches in general. In the above passage, we see that, to this end, Biden also resorts to an explicit expression of a negative assessment in relation to other world leaders,

extending this assessment also to an indefinite circle of people associated with him (we don't like), which can mean, in narrowly, his political associates, or, more broadly, more likely, US citizens in general.

For the purpose of manipulative influence on public consciousness, political figures in their speech use lexical units that reflect the values of American society, i.e., ideologemes. Such words in the pre-election discourse under consideration include such words as unity, freedom, protect, wealth, patriotism, etc.:

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 (Biden's 2020 60 Minutes interview).

In this example, Biden says that freedom as a value is expressed in respect for the freedom of others, and that wearing a mask in public places is a manifestation of patriotism.

It is impossible to establish any manipulations with information and adequately interpret disinformation, as many modern cognitive scientists note, without relying on the concept of "man - environment", developed by the Chilean biocognitive scientists H. Maturana and F. Varela (1992), postulating the idea that a person (a living cognitive system) forms an inseparable causal unity with its environment, which implies the need to analyze any phenomenon (including linguistic) to take into account various social, historical, cultural, temporal, spatial and other aspects of that environment, that broad socio-cultural context, in within which discursive changes take place.

A significant contribution to understanding the mechanisms of disinformation formation is also made by critical discourse analysis, the founder of which is Van Dijk. This research method is associated with the study of discursive manipulations, which include disinformation and rumors, which are aimed at controlling the minds, behavior and actions of people. Disinformation, according to this method, is the abuse of power by dominant social groups or elites (political, scientific, etc.). Elite groups control the volume and content of information and knowledge, the hierarchy of values and norms, influencing the formation of new and

the consolidation of existing opinions, assessments and ideologies. Disinformation as a type of discursive dominance violates the right of members of a certain community to be well informed about certain events. A negative cognitive consequence of such discursive dominance is social inequality and discrimination. Such manifestations of discursive dominance are most evident, in particular, in the context of racist discourse (Woolley & Howard, 2018).

A message or news is of a racist type if: 1) the negative actions of only black people are covered; 2) the emphasis is on the negative consequences of the actions of black youth; 3) the actions of blacks are nominated by certain ethnic or racial vocabulary; 4) the negative actions of blacks are covered as independent events, their social causes are hushed up; 5) “white” sources of information are involved, blaming the actions of minority groups and justifying the actions of the police (Saul, 2023). Other manipulative features of racist discourse can be certain non-verbal components (gestures, facial expressions, postures), creolized texts, images, compositional features of the text, lexical and syntactic means, special speech acts.

The (re)production of racist discourse is based on certain cognitive mechanisms of manipulation of public opinion. These include the use of emotionally colored events that influenced the mental (cognitive) niches of people, as well as various kinds of repetitions and comparisons with similar events that took place in the past, as a result of which the mental model of a particular event is generalized to the level of social representations attitudes and ideologies about important social issues.

A study of the disinformation posted in the media about the events of the summer of 2020 related to the Black Lives Matter movement shows that it is characterized by two fundamentally opposite trends. On the one hand, we can talk about the modeling of anti-racist discourse, and on the other hand, about the reproduction of racist discourse with the subsequent consolidation and spread of ethnic, racist stereotypes and prejudices. At the same time, it is important to be aware of and take into account the fact that the content and cognitive-pragmatic features of the disseminated fake news and media fakes are determined by which

political and ideological camp the subject of disinformation belongs to, what are his motives, intentions and attitudes, as well as by what strategic goal he haunts. The perception of information and determining the degree of its reliability also largely depends on political views, party views and positions, individual beliefs, status signs, belonging to a particular group, and other things.

It is important to note that the widespread disinformation has led to the emergence and rapid development of a new political communication culture - the culture of post-truth (Giusti, 2020; Van Dyk, 2022). In the context of post-truth, when the boundaries between truth and falsehood are blurred and conditions are created for the spread and perception of misinformation, such new concepts for mass media discourse as “post-racial” (post-racism) and “post-racial racism” are of interest. The first is connected with overcoming racial prejudice in society, the disappearance of the topic of racism from the agenda in the media. The second concept actualizes the racist sentiments that continue to persist, which are characteristic of the modern mass media space.

It is significant that manipulative tactics have become so integrated into the media discourse, predominantly English-speaking (due to the global factor), that even the educational sphere is not free from this phenomenon. In particular, manipulative communication tactics are used to create the image of the university. The following techniques are widely used in media discourse:

- Use of the promoted image. This tactic consists in using an image known to the audience to increase the recognition of the object and indirectly provoke the reader to transfer the positive characteristics of the already promoted image to the object.

- Referral to an expert. The tactic is implemented by embedding in the text the statements of authoritative speakers containing an expert assessment of the events and processes taking place in the university. The addresser can use the opinion of a disinterested person external to the organization as an argument to convince the addressee.

“Appeal to the motive of superiority” allows presenting universities as world-famous research centers capable of cooperating with organizations of various levels, satisfying their need for new materials, technologies and qualified employees. Through the use of such tactics as “reference to statistics” and “comparison of objects”, the presentation of universities takes on a kind of argument or illustration. Turning to the past of the university as the foundation of its present and future makes it possible to present universities as social institutions with a natural and consistent development. “The use of presupposition” allows addressees to create the effect of “universal recognition” of the high status of universities in the audience.

In 2017, the advertising watchdog has told six UK universities to take down marketing claims that could be misleading (Coughlan, 2017). The Advertising Standards Authority warned against exaggerated claims made to attract students: “Misleading would-be students is not only unfair, it can also lead them to make choices that aren't right for them” (Coughlan, 2017). Complaints were upheld against six universities (Coughlan, 2017):

- Falmouth University has been told to stop describing itself as “the UK's number one arts university” or “the UK's number one creative university”.
- Teesside University had a complaint upheld for saying it was the “Top university in England for long-term graduate prospects”.
- University of East Anglia has been told not to use the claim “Top 5 for student satisfaction”.
- University of Leicester must stop claiming to be “a top 1% world university”.
- University of Strathclyde has been told to change the claim “We're ranked No. 1 in the UK” for physics.
- University of West London must stop claiming to be “London's top modern university and one of the top 10 in the UK”.

Speaking about the educational manipulative discourse, it should be noted that most of the slogans of social advertising (which aims to perform the function of

social education and upbringing, which consist in increasing the level of literacy of the population in a certain area, attracting the attention of society to urgent problems of society) have signs of a manipulative discourse. The texts of social advertising in English, due to their diversity, repetition, conciseness and emotionality, have great potential for influencing the mass consciousness, where manipulateness creates the illusion of independence in creating the addressee, independence in making decisions or actions, the occurrence of which, however, is predicted in advance by the manipulator, which encodes its message in such a way that the recipient decodes it not in any way (this is precisely the restriction of the addressee's freedom), but in the way the manipulator needs it.

According to researchers, implicit information is often used in advertising texts of a social orientation to assign estimated values to an object and increase this rating (Llopis et al., 2017). Moreover, implicit information, according to the author, is not realized by the addressee, it operates outside the analytical processing of information, therefore the addressee is not inclined to evaluate it, treat it critically, and thus implicit information has a huge manipulative potential.

Hidden information plays a decisive role in English-language social advertising, because the social position is represented at the level of beliefs, which are quite difficult to change. For social advertising, the use of an explicit meaning is generally uncharacteristic: it talks about facts, but it means values. The target audience implicitly perceives information without analysis and critical evaluation, because it makes the appropriate conclusions on its own, which means it is aware of it in the form in which it is presented. Thus, implicit information is easily perceived by the addressee and influences the formation of thoughts about a social problem, bypassing the analytical procedures carried out by a person.

The popularity of the use of polysemy lies in the fact that a person usually does not notice the ambiguity of language structures, and also tends to understand the message in a sense that is more beneficial for himself (the effect of improving the message). Polysematicity violates the unambiguity of the expression of thought and leads to the “mixing” of the meanings of words (Bounchnak, 2015). Namely

polysemy, as the most important immanent property of a language system, makes it possible to operate with the final number of language units in an infinite plurality of contexts, and also determines the phenomenon of semantic diffuseness (Huff & Higdon, 2019). Semantic uncertainty allows different interpretations of the content of the advertising text, leads to the blurring of concepts. The text of English-language non-commercial advertising usually contains pragmatic intensifiers that distinguish the subject from a number of homogeneous ones and thereby focus the attention of the addressee on it. The role of a pragmatic intensifier can also be performed by emotionally neutral units.

The next actualizers of semantic manipulation are lexemes with positive or negative semantics that evoke appropriate emotions in recipients, which are favorable conditions for suggestion. Depending on the strategy, words with a positive / negative load are selected, which creates an appropriate associative chain when perceiving the message. Mostly such information is distorted by exaggeration or downplaying the weight of a certain phenomenon, object, subject, and the like. The strong affective component of such names blocks the rational-critical perception of reality and prevents its adequate understanding (Kuzio, 2014).

The use of an actualized negative emotion can contribute to attracting attention and remembering, which becomes the basis of a powerful influence, which can be optimized, in particular, with the help of truisms a generalized or generalized statement, a hypnotic replacement for a command, a property inherent in all or most. The purpose of the truism is to induce agreement, which provides a blocking of critical information processing, and also contributes to the creation of a report, defined by researchers as a process of education, maintaining an empathic, trusting relationship and deep understanding between two or more people, the ability to cause reactions from other people.

Also, as in political discourse, rhetorical questions can serve the purpose of optimizing influence, which create a feeling of incompleteness of an action, a kind of discomfort or a reason to reflect on what has been said. The use of rhetorical questions, which contain a planned, predictable answer, allows simulating it in

advance. Thus, it seems that the addressee made conclusions on his own, without outside help, but it is better to remember exactly the information that the person worked out himself.

In general, the manipulative strategies considered in the article are the necessary basis for a qualitative and quantitative analysis of modern means of manipulating mass consciousness in terms of their success. The implementation of both macrostrategies and individual tactics makes the discourse implemented in the media space highly manipulative. Simplifying the perception of reality and imposing falsely oriented assessments on the addressee contributes to the polarization of moods and the reduction of critical thinking in society, which, in turn, facilitates the manipulation of mass consciousness. Further research in this area can be aimed at identifying the success factors of manipulative strategies in the English text in parallel with the creation of “dictionaries and grammar of manipulation”, which will contribute to the algorithmization of the search for manipulative content in the English-language media space, with the potential to use the possibilities of Big Data.

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