

Antithesis as Leverage in Russian Political Discourse¹

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Abstract

In this article, the questions of speech impact in political discourse are analyzed. It is an accepted fact that political discourse is, unsurprisingly, a discourse made for politicians. The main function of the political text is the function of speech impact. Linguists that study political discourse are interested in how exactly language tools are used by the author to express different political statements. The subjects of study are, in this case, those language tools that can be used to influence the conversationalist. Antithesis is, as commonly known, a figure of speech, which is built on contrast of comparable concepts. In terms of creation, antithesis can be represented by two words or two groups of words that are related to each other by the lexical and contextual antonymy. The article is focused on how modern Russian politicians are using antithesis in their speeches. The main method of this research is the conceptual analysis, which can produce detailed analysis of text fragments, where antithesis is used, and analyze the dependency of meanings of the words that create antithesis itself in terms of context. In a study, the continuous sampling and linguistic observation and description methods were used. The article analyzes speeches of such prominent Russian politicians as V.V. Putin, S.V. Lavrov and V.V. Zhirinovskiy. Particular emphasis in this study has been placed on the antithesis usage by politicians. Certain conclusions related to the usage of antithesis in Russian political discourse have been made. Antithesis is a powerful persuasive tool in the political discourse. The main features of current research and the collected factual material can be interesting to the specialists in the discourse field and also can be used while creating training courses for communication and special courses for researching of political discourse specificity in the modern Russian society.

Keywords: Communication; Speech Impact; Antithesis, Political Discourse.

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1. Introduction

Antithesis is, as commonly known, a figure of speech, which is built on contrast of comparable concepts. In terms of creation, antithesis can be represented by two words or two groups of words that are related to each other by the lexical and contextual antonymy. Its importance as one of the most powerful persuasive tools was noted by classical orators. It is enough to recall Cicero's speech against the senator Catiline, where antithesis was predominantly used by the great rhetorician. Moreover, such researchers of political discourse as Chudinov (2006), Shejgal (2004) and others have repeatedly noted this persuasive tool and its role in foreign and domestic politicians' speeches. The Czech researcher of political discourse and political speeches Dontcheva-Navratilova (2017) states these attributes of interpretation of political discourse: "The interpretation of meaning conveyed in political discourse is heavily dependent on multifaceted contextual factors. Consequently, in the process of discourse comprehension, interactants establish complex intertextual, interdiscursive, social and (inter-)cultural connections which may yield variation in the resulting interpretations". Despite the heightened interest of modern researchers to the studying of discourse and its possibilities (Miftakhova et al., 2017; Zhao Yaling, Shulezhkova et al., 2017; Anastasia et al., 2018; Sagajdachnaya, 2009; Yapparova & Bochina, 2015), there are currently no separate works dedicated to the research of antithesis as a powerful persuasive tool in the political discourse (Mohammad et al, 2018).

2. Methods

In this study, different methods of linguistic analysis of text were used. The main method is the conceptual analysis, which can produce detailed analysis of text fragments, where antithesis is used, and analyze the dependency of meanings of the words that create antithesis itself in terms of context. The continuous sampling and linguistic observation and description methods were also used in this study (Baykalova et al., 2018).

The descriptive method allows us to discover the uniqueness of antithesis usage by Russian politicians as a stylistic method of creating a speech impact aimed at the audience in terms of mass communications. The article analyzes speeches of such prominent Russian politicians as V.V. Putin, S.V. Lavrov and others, where different methods of antithesis creation were used in Russian political discourse.

3. Results and Discussion

We have noted exactly which methods of antithesis realization modern Russian politicians use.

According to several researchers, antithesis is "widely used for the juxtaposition of speaker's ("correct") actions or qualities to the "incorrect" actions or

qualities of the opponent” (Vladimirova & Tupikova, 2019). In a broad sense, the so-called political antithesis implements the “friend-or-foe” opposition, which can be named as one of the main methods of speech impact aimed at the audience in the political discourse.

This can be seen, for example, in the speeches of Zhirinovskiy, Russian political party leader “LDPR”. In his speech at the rally celebrating 5 years of Crimea being under Russian rule, he mentioned the following phrase: “*Zhiteli Kryma 25 let proveli v okkupacii i vyderzhali! My tam, v Moskve byli – nam horosho, vse dlya nas bylo, a zdes' vam bylo tyazhelo – vy sozhaleli, chto est' Moskva, Rossiya, i est' otdel'no Kiev i Krym*” (Zhirinovskij). There, antithesis is implemented not only by the usage of regular antonyms (“*tam*” and “*zdes'*”), but also by the usage of contextual antonyms (“*horosho*” – “*tyazhelo*”, “*Moskva*” – “*Kiev*”). Note that the “friend-or-foe” opposition is supported by the word “*okkupaciya*” (occupation). This shows that antithesis quite often is followed by other expressive means, which make it more powerful, i.e. being able to possess persuasive features.

The same “friend-or-foe” opposition with another form is seen in the speech of Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov at the Munich Security Conference (2015): “*Pochemu v sluchayah, naprimer, s Afganistanom, Liviej, Irakom, Jemenom, Mali, Yuzhnym Sudanom nashi partnery nastojchivo prizyvayut pravitel'stva dogovarivat'sya s oppoziciej, s povstancami, v otdel'nyh sluchayah – dazhe s ekstremistami, a v otnoshenii ukrainskogo krizisa postupayut inache, fakticheski potakaya silovoj operacii Kieva, vplot' do opravdaniya ili popytok opravdat' primeneniye kassetnyh boepripasov*” (Myunhenskaya rech' Lavrova). Note how the head of Russian diplomacy tactfully calls their opponents “*nashi partnery*” (our partners). The antithesis itself is being implemented by the context contrast (“*prizyvayut pravitel'stva dogovarivat'sya s oppoziciej*” – “*postupayut inache, fakticheski potakaya silovoj operacii*”).

In the speeches of Russian politicians, the uses of antithesis that utilizes contextual antonyms or oppositions with the speech particle *ne* are common. Natalia Poklonskaya, during her interview, used the “*obychnye lyudi – politiki*” opposition while discussing the situation regarding Crimean Peninsula in order to underline the difference between different perceptions of the same situation, while using verbs “*priznayut – ne priznayut*” to enhance the opposition: “*Obychnye lyudi v SSHA, Velikobritanii, Germanii, drugih stranah ponimayut i priznayut, dlya nih Krym vsegda istoricheski otozhdestvlyalsya s russkoj zemlej. Politiki ne priznayut – nu, eto politika, intrigi, raznye motivy i celi, bor'ba za mirovoe gospodstvo*” (Interv'yu deputata Gosdumy). The fact that this politician used a pair of verbs “*ponimayut i priznayut*” to explain “common citizens” position and a single verb “*ne priznayut*” to contrast “politicians” position is noteworthy. It implies that “politicians” understand (*ponimayut*) the situation too, but, according to Poklonskaya’s description, intentionally do not accept due to the listed reasons.

Consider the following example of antithesis used by S.V. Lavrov in the speech mentioned before: “*Proekt postroeniya «obshcheevropejskogo doma» ne sostoyalsya imenno potomu, chto nashi partnery na Zapade rukovodstvovalis' ne interesami vozvedeniya otkrytoj arhitektury bezopasnosti pri vzaimnom uvazhenii interesov, a illyuziyami i ubezhdeniyami pobeditelej v holodnoj vojne*” (Myunhenskaya). The adversary construction with negative parts followed by contextual antonyms (“*ne interesami..., a illyuziyami*”), is quite curious. Moreover, the whole sentence can be considered as contextual antithesis followed by the unfolded metaphor (“*vozvedenie otkrytoj arhitektury bezopasnosti*”). This only confirms the fact that organic synthesis of different expressive means can possess a strong persuasive feature.

Audience influencing is important in every situation of spoken communication, but in terms of political discourse, it is one of the most necessary conditions, since every politician expresses his position and urges people to follow him. Antithesis with implementation of “friend-or-foe” opposition is even seen in speeches of Russian politicians that are not even related to anything political. A prime example of such antithesis can be seen in a speech of Chairwoman of the Federation Council Valentina Matviyenko related to the 2018 FIFA World Cup: “*Ya schitayu, chto ni v koj mere nel'zya politiku privnosit' v sport. Eto nechestno, eto ne po-sportivnomu. A te, kto schitaet po-drugomu, pust' oni luchshe ostayutsya doma*” (Interv'yu Predsedatelya Soveta Federacii Valentiny Matvienko korrespondentu RIA Novosti). In this case, the pronoun “*oni*” includes all people that disagree with the V. Matviyenko’s opinion, which she states very clearly on lexical and grammar levels with the usage of denial with amplification: ...*ni v koj mere nel'zya... nechestno... ne po-sportivnomu*. In the last sentence the imperative form (*pust' ostayutsya*) can be seen both as an advice and as a warning: the who disagree are better (*luchshe*) off home.

Antithesis, built on the relations of contrasts between compared phenomena, can be seen in speeches of the President of Russian Federation V.V. Putin. In his speech at the 70th Session of the UN General Assembly, the head of state said, referring to the situation in the Middle East and North Africa: “*Agressivnoe vneshnee vmeshatel'stvo privelo k tomu, chto vmesto reform gosudarstvennyye instituty da i sam uklad zhizni byli prosto besceremonno razrusheny. Vmesto torzhestva demokratii i progressa – nasilie, nishcheta, social'naya katastrofa, a prava cheloveka, vklyuchaya i pravo na zhizn', ni vo chto ne stavyatsya*” (Putin). This example features antithesis, which is backed up by the lexicon (“*agressivnoe*”, “*besceremonno*”) that makes it more vivid and significant.

In the same speech, V.V. Putin, talking about world economic situation, uses the context antithesis: “*V protivopolozhnost' politike eksklyuzivnosti Rossiya predlagaet garmonizaciyu regional'nyh ekonomicheskikh proektov, tak nazyvaemuyu integraciyu integracij, osnovannuyu na universal'nyh prozrachnyh principah*”

mezhdunarodnoj trgovli” [14]. In this case, antithesis absent of excessive expressiveness creates an effect of serious and constructive dialogue.

While using antithesis as a strong method of expressiveness and persuasiveness creating, cases of lexical field expanding by the usage of synonyms, language or contextual ones, in a series of oppositions is common. The prime example of this is seen in an interview with Chairwoman of the Federation Council Valentina Matviyenko to the RIA Novosti correspondent: “*S uchetom psihologii podrostkov vysok risk togo, chto oni mogut stat' ob"ektom manipuljacji so storony destruktivnyh sil. Deti mogut pytat'sya uchastvovat' v nesankcionirovannyh akcijah – s tem, chtoby bravirovat' pered sverstnikami svoej smelost'ju, samostoyatel'nost'ju. No ih roditeli, shkol'nye uchitelya, drugie vzroslye lyudi ne imeyut prava spokojno vzirat' na eto. Oni obyazany sdelat' vse, chtoby ob"yasnit' im, chem chrevato podobnoe povedenie*” [13]. On the one hand, the use of language synonyms: *deti, podrostki*. On the other hand, the expanding of synonymous row in antithesis by using contextual synonyms: *roditeli, shkol'nye uchitelya, drugie vzroslye lyudi*. Undoubtedly, other expressive means besides antithesis are used in order to give the statement a strong persuasive power. The use of syntactic parallelism stands out: *...oni mogut stat' ob"ektom manipuljacji ...deti mogut pytat'sya uchastvovat' v nesankcionirovannyh akcijah*; use of high vocabulary: *bravirovat'* (neutral form - *hvastat'sya*), *vzirat'* (neutral form - *smotret'*), *chrevato* (neutral form - *opasno*); gradations: *...smelost'ju, samostoyatel'nost'ju*.

4. Summary

In the end, Russian politicians quite often use such vivid method as antithesis for an effective speech impact. The carried out contextual analysis of media speeches and dialogues of politicians with representatives of other nations and political parties has shown us that antithesis is a strong persuasive tool in the political discourse. Skillful contextual usage of antithesis can help speaker find their proper psychological distance and, at the same time, can help a politician underline his position in a binary opposition of “friend-or-foe”.

5. Conclusions

The authors' conclusion is that the chosen factual material suggests that antithesis, which is used in order to create a vivid statement in the political discourse, is one of the most common method in Russian political communication. The main features of the current research and the collected factual material can be interesting to the specialists in the discourse field and also can be used while creating training courses for communication and special courses for researching of political discourse specificity in the modern Russian society.

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