EUPHEMIZATION FEATURES OF CURRENT FRENCH POLITICAL ARTICLES HEADLINES
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ABSTRACT
The article deals with the analyses of the headline linguistic constructions of French political articles, including euphemisms, presented in such modern mass media in France and Belgium as «Le Monde», «Le Monde diplomatique», «L'OBS», «L'Express», «La Libre», «Marianne», «L'Opinion». Currently, journalists consider euphemizing to be a common feature of the headlines of the articles concerning political issues. This technique effects readers' emotions smoothly. Implementation of euphemisms in French articles of journalistic genre helps avoid mentioning unpleasant or even shocking reality. The enhancement technique is used in the case a lexeme of positive meaning replaces a negative phenomenon or fact. The examples, given in this article, highlight the manipulative nature of euphemisms, which is specific for the French political press style. Recipients should be informed about political issues, but occasionally the authorities and the media provide them with facts in a specific manner not to cause strong, sometimes premature confusion and discontent.

Keywords: Euphemism. Meiosis. Axiological neutralization. Enhancement.

RECURSOS DE EUFEMIZAÇÃO DAS ATUAIS MANCHETES DE ARTIGOS POLÍTICOS FRANCÉS
RECURSOS ACTUALES DE EUFEMIZACIÓN DE TÍTULOS DE LOS ARTÍCULOS EN LA POLÍTICA FRANCESA

RESUMO


RESUMEN
El artículo trata del análisis de las construcciones lingüísticas de los títulos de los artículos políticos franceses, incluidos los eufemismos, presentados en los medios de comunicación modernos de Francia y Bélgica como «Le Monde», «Le Monde diplomatique», «L'OBS», «L'Express», «La Libre», «Marianne», «L’Opinion». Actualmente, los periodistas consideran que el eufemismo es una característica común de los titulares de los artículos sobre temas políticos. Esta técnica afecta las emociones de los lectores sin problemas. La implementación de eufemismos en artículos franceses de género periodístico ayuda a evitar mencionar la realidad desagradable o incluso chocante. La técnica de mejora se utiliza en el caso de que un lexema de significado positivo reemplace un fenómeno o hecho negativo. Los ejemplos que se dan en este artículo resultan la naturaleza manipuladora de los eufemismos, que es específica del estilo de la prensa política francesa. Los destinatarios deben ser informados sobre cuestiones políticas, pero ocasionalmente las autoridades y los medios de comunicación les proporcionan hechos de una manera específica para no causar confusión y descontento fuertes, a veces prematuros.

INTRODUCTION

A certain discourse is characterized by the definite linguistic phenomenon, and principles of their functioning and implementing. The authors, sharing the opinions of A.M. Baranov and E.G. Kazakevich, consider political discourse to be a complex of «... all the speech acts, used in political discussions and sanctified in accordance with traditions and proved empirically» (BARANOV, KAZAKEVICH, 1991).

Social sciences, studying the language functioning mechanism, consider discourse a polysemic concept. In the middle of the last century, the famous French politician Emile Benveniste, developing the theory of utterance, identified two plans: the plan of the narrative and the plan of the language (discourse), using the term «discourse» as a characteristic of «a speech, acquired by the speaker», i.e., according to E. Benveniste, the explication of the speaker's position in the utterance is in the focus of the analysis (BENVENISTE, 1985, 2009).

Nowadays, there are several definitions of the term «discourse» in linguistics. Thus, N.D. Arutynova considers discourse to be «a speech, immersed in life»; V.I. Karasik defines it as «a text, immersed in a communication situation». N.A. Krasilnikova highlights the identity of two concepts — a text and discourse (KARPUKHINA, KUZNETSOVA, 2018).

M.L. Makarov and A.V. Putkov have focused their studies on three main discourse aspects: formal, functional, and situational. In the light of the formal approach, discourse is considered to be a complex unit of successive, logically related sentences. Discourse, providing real-life communication, is a subject matter of the functional approach. In the light of the situational approach, discourse considers to be a coherent text in the certain communication environment; in other words, social, cultural, and psychological factors are of great importance (KARPUKHINA, KUZNETSOV, 2018).

It should be noted that V.I. Karasik identifies different types of discourse: political, business, pedagogical, scientific, and medical (KARASIK, 1999). Political discourse is of the main interest of the authors of the study, considering language, speech and political events, strongly related. Any political action is a speech act. Political processes are seen as communicative processes, provided by the language means (KLEIN, 1998; BAGHANA, BOCHAROVA, 2012).

E. I. Sheygal compares political discourse and «battlefield», considering the dialogue between the «party of power» and the opposition to be in the center; the communicators «attack each other, defending their positions, repel attacks and start triggering». The author considers the struggle for power to be the main feature of political discourse (SHEYGAL, 2000).

A French researcher M. Foucault also highlights the power of political discourse. In his opinion, there are certain political discourse rules and prohibitions, aimed to suppress something that does not correspond to the norms of the certain community (FOUCAULT, 1996).

The specific features of political discourse are as the followings: institutionality, informativity, semantic ambiguity, phantomness, fideism, esotericism, distancing, authoritarianism (SHEYGAL, 2004).

The media, in which a magazine or newspaper article plays a special role, is an important channel for political discourse spreading (KACHALOVA, 2013). The study of political discourse and linguistic ways of transmitting information by means of the media is the most relevant one for the current political situation.

The issues, concerning specific study of the headings of newspaper articles, have been drawing the linguists' attention. As mass media is both the means helping inform readers and influence their opinions, headings of newspaper articles function for these purposes.

Such language factors as the tendency to economy, expression, identity communication, speech creativity and author's style of speech text and pre-text formation determine the features, which are specific for headings of newspaper articles (AGAPOVA, 2011).

In a political article the author can express somebody’s opinion in two ways: directly explicit and hidden implicit. They are based on various stylistic devices: comparison, metaphor, anaphor, allusion, hint, and others (DOBROSKLONSKAYA, 2000).

Moreover, figurative ways of speech, characterized by a pronounced narrative, are of great researchers' interest. Evidently, euphemisms, effecting readers’ emotions, smoothly realize their pragmatic function.

Most often, politicians, complying with the norms of political correctness, have to replace various linguistic phenomena in their speeches. Therefore, officials and politicians tend to use language figures, that allow veiling
the linguistic aspects of real life.

Modern linguistic studies are devoted to the aspects of manipulative nature of euphemisms in the mass media language since they affect the readers’ consciousness. So, euphemisms are used to veil facts and events, as well as to cause readers’ antipathy to a particular event or phenomenon.

E.A. Uvarova considers euphemism to be a language unit, which allows writers mitigating a negative assessment of a denotation of positive connotations, but not violating the meaning of a statement (UVAROVA, 2010).

Particular euphemisms, specific for press language, denote negative referents according to the information, concerning different aspects of conflict situations, which are vital. Euphemisms of press language remodify conflict situations due to the definite processes: 1) The process of denomination serves to mask the lexemes, denoting the situations; in this case, euphemizing is the act of name denying or conditional name assigning (TOLSTOLUTSKAYA, SLEPTSOVA, SVISHCHEV, 2017); 2) Mitigating text processing deals with the referents’ negative character reduction as a result of the speech text mitigating strategies (SADOVNIKOVA, 2012; TOLSTOLUTSKAYA, SLEPTSOVA, SVISHCHEV, 2017).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The article presents the analyses of some headlines of French newspaper political articles, the context of which contains euphemisms. The analysis touches the classification of euphemisms, offered by M.N. Sadovnikova, and highlights the revaluation of negative referents of the modern French press language due to such techniques as understatement, axiological neutralization and enhancement (TOLSTOLUTSKAYA, SLEPTSOVA, SVISHCHEV, 2017).

Euphemisms are most often used to wield people’s consciousness by the means of mass media language. Euphemisms of weakly negative reference can be formed by meiosis – “a trope, helping downplay the intensity of the properties (signs) of an object, phenomenon, or process” (SKREBNEV, 1997). Some writers avoid mentioning the sense explicitly in order to wield people’s consciousness and not to be unmasked. Meiotic euphemisms provide a recipient with the understanding that a negative phenomenon is not deceived, and it is formulated in such a way that its influence is significantly mitigated. However, a manipulative potential of such euphemisms is considered to be significant (TOLSTOLUTSKAYA, SLEPTSOVA, SVISHCHEV, 2017).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Whereas the problem of euphemisms functioning is in focus in the articles of many famous linguists, the analysis of euphemization process of headings of some French political newspaper articles due to such devices as meiosis, axiological neutralization, and enhancement is first proposed in this article.

Purpose of the study

The study is aimed to analyze euphemisms that are specific for headings of some French political newspaper articles, according to the types of revaluation of negative referents.

Research methods

The study is based on the following research methods of linguistic analysis: componential analysis, linguistic phenomenon analysis, contextual analysis, and random sampling method.

Findings

The study reveals the headlines of French political articles in which the understatement is aimed to enhance the character of a negative denotation.

For example, the headline «La psychiatrie en grandesouffrance»— «Psychiatry is in stagnation» of the newspaper «Le Monde» contributes to veile the seriousness and significance of the event. On December 12, 2017 a strike was held by health care workers of Guillaume-Rainier psychiatric hospital in Rennes to protest against unbearable working conditions. Jean-Pierre Salvarelli, a member of the Syndicate of psychiatric hospitals, notes that the health care staff “got impatient” due to budget cuts, causing high employee turnover, a lack of beds in hospital departments, and an increased number of patients, who were treated by each health care worker (LE MONDE, 26.01.2018).
The word «conflict» of diffusive semantics, replacing the word «war», is the most frequently used one in the French press language. For example, the author of the article, writing the heading “Vers une solution globale du conflits israélo-arabe” – “Making a global solution about the Israeli-Arab conflict”, firstly, emphasizes that there are no winners, but losers in this war, though the extremists exult in their victory. Secondly, the writer does not use the word «war», trying not to cause the reader’s unnecessary concern (LE MONDE DIPLOMATIQUE, 04.10.2006). In the heading “Attentats anti-coptes de l’Egypte: 48 suspects bientôt jugés” – “Anti-COP ISIL attempts in Egypt: 48 suspects will soon be put on trial” (L’OBS, 21.05.2017) the author reports on 48 accused, who attacked churches in Northern Egypt and Cairo, where ISIL suicide bombers killed 74 people, as well as on those people, who killed eight police officers in a checkpoint attack last January. In this case, the word «attempt» of the negative connotative meaning is replaced by the word «attack».

The authors of the study have also got interested in the headline of the French newspaper article «Débandade américaine en Afghanistan» – «American stampede from Afghanistan». The article mentions a peace agreement of representatives of Afghan Taliban movement and USA on 29 February 2020, which stresses the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan and underlines the beginning of the inter-Afghan peace dialogue. In fact, at the very starting point, the signing of this agreement gave rise to false hopes, and the next day the Taliban resumed hostilities. The withdrawal of American troops turned into a «flight» under the Afghan fire.

The next heading «Afghanistan, Iran: des guerres très privées» – «Afghanistan, Iraq: private wars» is also characterized by an understatement and helps make the feature, causing a distortion of the readers’ understanding of the problem, weak. It is mentioned, that in Afghanistan, as well as in Iraq, the armies are represented by private military companies (SMP). The author of the article touches the problem of the growing trend of privatization of military operations by large private world armies and notes that the privatization of war, which began about 20 years ago, represents a huge market, estimated at 170 billion euros per year (L’EXPRESS, 12.08.2010).

In the headline of the article of the Belgian newspaper «La libre” “Philippe Goffin: Personne n’a à gagner d’un conflit majeur entre l’Iran et les États-Unis” – «Philippe Goffin: No one will benefit from a major conflict between Iran and the United States» the negative referent «rocket fire» is replaced by the phrase «main conflict». A negative character of the text of this headline is reduced due to the mitigating text processing, as a result of the speech strategies. The article touches the problem that at night between Tuesday and Wednesday, Iran fired a dozen missiles at two American bases, located in Iraq. In this case, the author focuses on the problem of emergency growth, which may cause more serious consequences in the relations between Iran and the United States (LA LIBRE BELGIQUE, 08.01.2020).

The journalists of French and Belgian newspapers, trying to veil the real situation, use such a device as axiologial neutralization to reevaluate the negative characteristics of referents, mentioned in the original concept; it results in a de-dramatized reality, that contributes to the people’s consciousness wielding (TOLSTOLUTSKAYA, SLEPTSOVA, SVISHCHEV, 2017).

For example, in the article «Construire l’Europe des citoyens!» – «Build a civil Europe!» [MARIANNE, 20.07.2015] Bruno Langlois notes that the engine, pushing the modern European Union for development, has «broke down» in the period of fifty-eight years. In this article the author highlights the decision of the UK to leave the European Union. However, the heading of the article makes readers hope, that an Initiative Committee, involving citizens, intellectuals, political activists, trade unions and associations of European peoples, will create a new type of Europe.

The headline of a political article «Irak, colosse à la tête d’argile» – «Iraq, colossus with a clay head» (MD, août 2016) reduces a negative character of long-term hostilities in Iraq. The author of this article, applying to the Bible, uses the aphorism “colossus with a clay head” to highlight instability and paralysis of the leadership unable to unite the country and to neutralize the fact of ongoing wars and military savagery on the territory of Iraq. The author of the article in the newspaper «Monde diplomatique», paraphrasing the popular quotation “colossus on clay feet”, which characterizes something majestic, but essentially weak, reports that the government is unable to unite the country and to guarantee the exhausted people to have a safety life (TOLSTOLUTSKAYA, SLEPTSOVA, SVISHCHEV, 2017).

In the article «Sur l’Amour, la pointe avancée de la Russie face au coronavirus» – «On Amur, the outpost of Russia in the face of the coronavirus» of French newspaper «Monde» [27 February 2020] the journalist, using the method of axiologial neutralization, gives the information about the situation in Blagoveshchensk, the only city, located between two mentioned countries, where mostly Chinese people live and work. That is why the author
of this article calls it “an outpost”. But the residents of the city consider not the coronavirus itself, but a possible break of Chinese-Russian ties; the damage seems catastrophic. In the headline of one more French article «Danse du sabre entre l'Iran et les États-Unis» «Saber dance between Iran and the USA» the author replaces a negative denotation «confrontation, opposition» due to famous music of the ballet «Gayane» and «Saber dance». The author focuses on a secret agreement and, at the same time, on the rivalry of two countries over the nuclear weapons, used by the Islamic Republic. The author of the article, implementing the enhancement method, veils the essence of the present situation. In this case, a negative denotation is replaced by a textual reminiscence «saber dance», thus helping the author improve his personal position and produce greater impact on readers. The language analysis of French newspapers and magazines articles allows the authors of the article identifying enhancement—a linguistic device, to help readers understand revaluation of referent’s negative characteristics. Enhancement gives a chance to replace the word of the negative connotative meaning by a one of more positive connotative meaning.

Having analysed political articles of contemporary French media, we can mention the following headline: «Coronavirus: les masques, objet de discordes politique» – «Coronavirus: masks become objects of political controversy» (L'OPINION, 20.03.2020). Evidently, the article deals with the fact, that in the light of the current coronavirus, spreading around the globe, France has faced a lack of medical face masks. The opposition calls on the government to explain the current situation in the country and informs about people’s wish to see the prospects of their lives improvement. The author of the article tries to mitigate readers’ impression through enhancement, just focusing on people’s demand to bring to justice, having changed the lexeme «conflicts» of a negative connotation into the word “discord” of a more positive connotation.

In the headline of the article «Baccalauréat: lesscénariosd’unesortiedecrise» – «Undergraduate: scenario for overcoming the crisis» a negative referent «virus Covid-19» is replaced by a lexical unit «crisis», which softens the essence of the headline and reduces the negative attitude, concerning the described situation. The article highlights the teachers’ dissatisfaction after the first high school students’ knowledge test. But the author of the article assigns a secondary role, making readers focus on the upcoming decision of the Minister of National Education, Jean-Michel Blanket, to quit the crisis situation in the field of education during the quarantine period.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the study reveals that the headings of political articles, falling within the figurative framework of euphemistic statements that help de-dramatize the reality, are the most important component of the body of the article, concerning a mitigating impact on readers’ emotions. French political articles headings of such a type allow a writer providing enhancement of a negative denotation and drawing a discrete veil of an unpleasant and even a shocked real-life situation, as well as showing his own opinion about the current political events.

In the language of modern French media, headline constructions, including euphemisms, which are formed due to meiosis, are of great importance and help mitigate the significance of the current events. The authors tend to use the method of axiological neutralization in order to veil the real-life situations. Enhancement is a technique, helping reevaluate negative referents in the headlines of the modern French press political articles. Hence, the euphemisms, being the elements of headlines of political articles, are of a neutral connotation and of a great potential to influence the readers’ opinions and impressions; such communication device can be used to replace unsuitable words and expressions and to cause a negative reaction of readers in a certain real-life situation.

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