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Gender influence on the idioms choice and functioning in political speeches of Margaret Thatcher and John Major

Статтю присвячено аналізу особливостей вибору номінативних одиниць політиками різної статі та впливу гендера політичного діяча на вживання фразеологічних одиниць у його промовах. На прикладах ідіом, визначених у текстах промов британських прем'єр-міністрів Маргарет Тетчер та Джона Мейджора, показано, що існує вплив статі політика на вибір фразеологічних одиниць.

Ключові слова: гендер, політичний дискурс, комунікативна поведінка, фразеологічна одиниця.

Статья посвящена анализу особенностей выбора номинативных единиц политиками разного пола и влияния гендера политика на употребление фразеологических единиц в его речах. На примере идиом, выделенных в текстах речей британских премьер-министров Маргарет Тетчер и Джона Мейджора, показано, что существует влияние пола политика на выбор фразеологических единиц.

Ключевые слова: гендер, политический дискурс, коммуникативное поведение, фразеологическая единица (идиома).

The article analyzes the peculiarities of the choice of nominating units by politicians of different gender and influence of the gender of a politician on the usage of idioms in speeches. On the basis of examples which have been selected from the texts of speeches, it is shown that there exists an influence of the gender of a politician on the choice of phraseological units.

Key words: gender, political discourse, communicative behavior, idiom.

The importance of language in the world of politics is reflected in philosophical and linguistic problems of correlation between language and authority, agitation, propaganda and political advertising, in formativeness and credibility in political communication, the learning of language as an instrument of social power, the usage of language with a view to influence the consciousness of masses and means of creation of the image of a politician. In linguistics this subject – matter is virtually correspondent to the problem of political discourse, which has recently become a popular object of research on the material of different languages.

The aim of this article is to compare the peculiarities of gender influence on the choice and functioning of phraseological units in political speeches of the British Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher and John Major. The task of the article is to compare the choice and the usage of phraseological units taking into account the gender of a politician.

The topical issue to study today is the ability of political discourse to persuade and stimulate the audience to certain actions and the interpretation of the influence of speech as it is. Political discourse is a phenomenon that we come across in everyday life. The struggle for power is the main theme and moving force in this sphere of communication. Since this struggle is realized through language, the existence of linguistic investigations within political science becomes inevitable. Besides, the gender of a politician makes a great effect on the construction of the political address and the choice of language units.

We can say that specific political situations and processes (such as political debates, political press briefings) determine discourse organization and textual structure of a variety of discourse types (or genres) in which political discourse as a complex form of human activity is realized.

Speech reflects social and personal position, the attitude of the participants of communication to each other.

At the present stage of gender investigations the scholars emphasize that gender is conditioned not only biologically, but also socially (what position the person occupies in society) and culturally. The term "gender" has a number of definitions. Colloquially, it is used interchangeably with "sex" to denote the condition of being male or female, but in the social sciences, it refers specifically to social differences but not limited to gender identity. Accordingly, gender as a socio-cultural category is represented in the structure of the language consciousness of an individual. The gender of the speaker is an integral part of a linguistic personality, a complex of biological and socio-cultural characteristics and is updated in speech in each situation of communication [3, p. 148].

More often gender is treated as a cognitive phenomenon and becomes apparent not only in the speech clichés but also in the communicative behavior of the native speaker. By "communicative behavior" we understand the set of norms and traditions of people as regards communication, age, professional and other groups according to I. A. Sternin [5, p. 106–110].

There exists a certain scientific standpoint concerning the styles of male and female communication: women are mostly orientated to the atmosphere of communication and interpersonal aspects, while the men – to social statuses and power, they adapt to hierarchal social roles in communication; facts, numbers and results are important for them. Quite on the contrary, women prefer equal communication in which they orient themselves to the person they are talking to and expect such orientation in return, while men choose the role of Lone Ranger, who wins a certain position [4, p. 196–216].

The life style of men and women influences the communication of both genders. The male life style is more effective and instrumental, while the female one is emotional, which is connected with the particular functions of women as mothers and men as breadwinners. The differences in role behavior of men and women are affected by the fact that in modern society the first place for the majority of men is their occupation, while for women that is family [1, p. 24].

Women are more likely than men to make utterances that demand or encourage responses from their fellow speakers. Women display a greater tendency to ask questions. What is more, women show a greater tendency to make use of positive minimal responses, especially "mm hmm", and are more likely to insert such comments throughout streams of talk rather than simply at the end. Besides, women are more likely to adopt a strategy of "silent protest" after they have been interrupted or have received a delayed minimal response. Women show a greater tendency to use the pronouns "you" and "we", which explicitly acknowledge the existence of the other speaker [4, p. 197]. Unlike women, men are more likely to interrupt the speech of their conversational partners, that is, to interrupt the speech of women. They are more likely to challenge or dispute their partners' utterances. In addition to it, they are more likely to ignore the comments of the other speaker, that is, to respond slowly in what has been described as a "delayed minimal response" or to respond unenthusiastically. Men make more direct declarations of fact or opinion than do women, including suggestions, opinions, etc.

The features of male and female communication mentioned above may influence the usage of emotionally colored units in their speech. Women more often use epithets, intensifiers, and adjectives in the comparative and superlative degrees, adverbs, metaphors and phraseological units. The speeches of men are more restrained and do not contain a great amount of emotionally colored units.

Phraseological resources of language are a complicated conglomerate of original and borrowed units, which give the brightest idea about the peculiarities of gender stratification of society in contrast to other means of expression in language. They display universality and characteristic peculiarities of any specific national worldview. Due to inexhaustible resources of phraseology we can learn about traditions and customs of a nation. Therefore, there appear more and more linguistic researches which are orientated to the distinguishing of gender differences in phraseological structures of various languages.

Each politician is regarded to be a skilled master of his word that becomes the evidence of his own personality. What is more, politicians are aware of the fact that to be correctly understood by voters they should speak plain English. Correspondingly, in political speeches they make use of colloquial vocabulary, and even idioms. These units make their speeches more expressive and comprehensible for the audience.

The political texts of Margaret Thatcher and John Major served as a basis for investigation of the influence of gender of the politician on the frequency and the way of usage of phraseological units in their political speeches.

In our work we adhere to the classification which was suggested by one of the best-known linguists working in the sphere of phraseology, Prof. A. V. Kunin. According to A. V. Kunin, phraseological units are stable word-groups whose meanings are partially or fully transferred. His classification of these units is based on the functions the units fulfill in speech. They may be nominating (e. g. **common sense** "здоровий глузд, практичний розум"), interjectional (e. g. **Thank God** "дякувати Борові!"), communicative (e. g. **come what may** "що буде, те й буде"). Further classification into subclasses depends on whether the units are changeable or unchangeable, whether the meaning of one element remains free, and, more generally, on the interdependence between the meaning of the element and the meaning of the set expression.

Our analysis of political speeches made by the two successive Prime Ministers of Great Britain is based on the speeches of John Major and Margaret Thatcher.

Margaret Thatcher was at the head of the British Government from 1979 to 1990.

Before she began his active political life, she worked as a chemist. John Major succeeded her in 1990; formerly he worked as a clerk. It is quite possible that their former education and occupation found reflection in the linguistic characteristics of their political discourse.

We have studied 20 public speeches by each of the two politicians in order to find out how they use idiomatic expressions, what their linguistic peculiarities are, how they contribute to intensifying the expressiveness of their political discourse and its influence on the audience. Phraseological units found in Margaret Thatcher's speeches are mostly verbal expressions, which is explained by their greater dynamic power, necessity to convince the audience of the truthfulness of her arguments and strengthen their belief in her as a charismatic political leader.

Let us analyze some fragments from her speeches, paying attention to the properties of the verbal phraseological units.

*Of course this places a burden on us. But we must be willing to **bear this burden** if we want our freedom to survive (19.01.1976).*

This sentence from the speech in Kensington Town Hall (Britain Awake) is devoted to the problem of enlargement of armaments since Margaret Thatcher considers Great Britain to be a poorer country than its other NATO allies. As Head of the Government she tried to convince people that was not the time for anyone to talk about the ways of cutting the defense forces, quite on the contrary, though it might be a burden for everyone, it was urgent to strengthen them. To make a greater impact on the audience, the speaker uses the verbal idiom **to bear the burden** (to endure something distressing, painful, stressful, or emotionally or physically taxing, especially for the sake of others). Following A. Kunin's classification [2, p. 145], we can say that according to its semantic peculiarities it can be referred to non-comparative, partially reinterpreted, motivated units. It consists of a verb used in the literary meaning and a noun used in a transferred meaning. From the stylistic point of view this idiom belongs to bookish phrases, used on solemn occasions.

*Thanks to a still-accelerating technological revolution we **become** daily more **aware** that the earth and its resources are finite and in most respects **shrinking** (18.12.1979).*

Margaret Thatcher used this sentence addressed to the problems concerning the policy of Great Britain. To intensify its effect, she used the idiom **to be / become aware of something** (to be conscious or to have knowledge of something). This phraseological unit is a non-comparative, fully reinterpreted, motivated unit; it denotes the state of a person. From the grammatical point of view it has subordinate structure, the verb is always used in the Active Voice, the components are based on constant-variant dependency. In the stylistic aspect this PhU is neutral in status.

Besides the abundance of verbal idioms, Margaret Thatcher's public speeches include a few expressions belonging to the other structural-semantic and grammatical classes.

*The men in the Soviet politburo don't have to worry about **the ebb and flow** of public opinion. They put **guns** before **butter**, while we put just about everything before guns* (19.01.1976).

This sentence is taken from Margaret Thatcher's speech dealing with the problem of tense relationships with the Soviet Union. She was assured that the Russians were bent on the world dominance and they were rapidly acquiring the means to become the most powerful imperial nation the world had seen. The Prime Minister accused the Government of the Soviet Union of solving problems in a military way. In addition to it, she affirmed that it was a super power only in one sense – military sense.

In this situation Margaret Thatcher makes use of the substantival idioms which are as follows: **ebb and flow** (a decline and increase, constant fluctuations) and **guns and butter** (the increase of expense on defense without doing any harm to economy and social security of people). The idiom **ebb and flow** has such characteristics: it is fully reinterpreted, with the structure of word-combination, motivated unit, which denotes an abstract notion, what is more, it has coordinative structure, the type of connection in this idiom is copulative-adversative. The idiom **guns and butter** possess the same characteristic features.

Another class of idioms represented in political speeches of Margaret Thatcher is adverbial idioms.

*There was always an assurance that we would keep our identity and our veto but gradually, **little by little**, it went and everything came in stages* (07.06.1993).

Margaret Thatcher used this sentence in her speech to show her reluctance to join the European Union. She believed that the European Union was "ever closer union" for Great Britain where it would never lose its identity. The European Union was the only destination to which Great Britain was ready to go by a fast or slow train. But the time showed there was nothing good in it. The Prime Minister insisted that their country would never go by that train. To intensify the effect, Margaret Thatcher uses the adverbial idiom **little by little** (to do something gradually, by small degrees, slowly) which has the following peculiarities. This is a qualitative unit that functions as an adverbial modifier of manner or action, has subordinate structure.

In political speeches by John Major we have singled out the following Ph Us.

Let us see the peculiarities of the verbal phraseological units which show expressiveness of the speaker's discourse.

*So tell me how it is – without the gloss of intermediary comment. That's the way to hammer home our message and make sure it is received. In this we **have an advantage** (26.02.1993).*

John Major used this sentence in connection with the on-going elections. The politician persuades the audience that only due to communication with the authorities and the desire to assure them that politics is about them, about their lives. That is why all policies are based on individual choice, individual opportunity, and individual responsibility. That is the information John Major's party want to deliver to everyone. To make a greater impact on the audience, the speaker uses the verbal idiom **to have an advantage** (*to have a position superior to that of someone else; a status wherein one controls or has superiority or authority over someone else*). This phraseological unit is non-comparative, fully reinterpreted, motivated. Besides, it denotes the state of a person. From the grammatical viewpoint it has subordinate structure, the change of form is observed in the verbal component. The components are based on constant-variant dependency. In the stylistic aspect this PhU is neutral in status.

*It would be extraordinary if, as part of an overall political agreement, two countries sharing a border on an island did not look for ways to work together where that **made sense** to both (04.01.1994).*

One of the key issues is the external relationships of Northern Ireland and the South. To reach this aim Northern Ireland needs a form of government that people can identify with, and where they can participate, a form of government that is fully accountable and commands support in all sections of the community. John Major is determined to restore properly based local democracy in Northern Ireland.

to make sense – *to be understandable; to be reasonable, wise or practical*. This PhU is referred to non-reinterpreted verbal phraseomatic units with additional-specifying meaning, consists of a verb used in neutral meaning and a noun used in transferred meaning.

*Liberals touching their cap and opening the door for Labour. Lib-Lab pacts are putting up council taxes and snuffing out **common sense** (26.02.1994).*

In this situation John Major criticizes the actions of the Labour Party, the participants of which assumed that PR was the key to a new style of politics and that was half true at least. Because it was a Liberal key to a Labour Britain. Wherever people have voted Liberal in protest, the

Liberals have used that key to open the Town Hall door for Labour. Furthermore, he was not satisfied with Lib – Lab pacts which might have undergone the criticism. In order to show the absurdity of these pacts Major makes use of the substantival PhU **common sense** – *plain ordinary good judgment; sound practical sense*. This PhU has the characteristics which are as follows. It is a partially reinterpreted, motivated phraseological unit which denotes a human quality. It has a subordinate structure.

One more class of phraseological units represented in John Major's speech is adverbial PhUs.

*A Britain that is **at ease** with itself* (12.02.1997).

This sentence is taken from John Major's speech dealing with the problem of racial tolerance. He confirmed that his aim was to make Britain the best place in the world to live. By that he meant that Britain had to be tolerant, Britain that was at ease with itself. And a Britain where everyone has the opportunity to make a success of life, regardless of colour, race, creed, or background. To intensify the effect, he used the idiom **at ease** – *comfortable, relaxed, unembarrassed*. It is characterized as a qualitative PhU. This is an adverbial PhU of the manner of action, which has a subordinate structure beginning with a preposition.

Now let us analyze the peculiarities of **functioning** of phraseological units in context, i. e. political speeches.

In political speeches a phraseological unit is introduced by a phraseological actualizer. By "phraseological actualizer" we understand a word, a phrase, a sentence or the group of sentences which are semantically connected with the phraseological units used in these contexts, and which introduce them into speech in usual or occasional use. Context is part of the text, singled out and united by language or speech unit, which are determined by the actualizer in usual or occasional usage. Phraseological context in political speeches can be subdivided into three types: interphrasal, phrasal, superphrasal.

Interphrasal phraseological context is a phraseological unit and its actualizer, expressed by a word or word-combination as a part of a simple or compound sentence. For example, "*We have a responsibility **to give a lead** on this, a responsibility which is particularly directed towards the less developed countries*" (20.09.1988). In this sentence, we come across the phraseological unit **to give a lead** (*to start doing something in order to encourage others to do something*) with its actualizer. In this speech Margaret Thatcher announces her guiding principles for Europe in general and Britain in particular.

Phrasal phraseological context is a phraseological unit and its actualizer expressed by a sentence which can be simple or compound. In this situation the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher speaks about the effect of the European Court upon the sphere of politics and upon the community. *It is busy reinterpreting so many things to give itself and the Community more powers **at our expense** (19.01.1976) – **at one's expense** (to the detriment of someone or something).*

Superphrasal phraseological context is a phraseological unit and its actualizer expressed by two or more simple or compound sentences. For example, *Against the enormous changes that are **taking place**, we need what I call "grown-up" politics. For one small gesture can create a global impact; **to take place** – to happen, to occur.*

In the political speeches by Margaret Thatcher and John Major we distinguish the following external relations of phraseological units in the context.

1) Combinability:

a) contact – the PhU and its actualizer stand close to each other.

For example, ***to stand in one's way** – to prevent somebody from doing something:*

*I am determined to see them played far more in our schools. And I don't want to see classroom wars or perverted political ideology **stand in the way** (26.02.1994);*

b) distant – the PhU and its actualizer are separated by a word, word-combination or a punctuation mark.

The example of distant combinability is taken from the speech by Margaret Thatcher to the Conservative Rally at Cheltenham and it is as follows:

***to meet one's needs** – satisfy needs:*

***To meet their needs** we have already offered to the ancillary workers almost exactly what we have given to our Armed Forces and to our teachers, and more than our Civil Servants have accepted (03.08.1982).*

2) Correlativeness – constant or distant position in which a PhU is realized depending on the message of a situation.

*Politicians can't decide and **heaven knows** it is difficult enough for our own Advisory Body of Scientists to say yea or nay to the many applications (27.09.1988).*

***Heaven knows** means 1. truly, certainly, definitely. 2. God only knows Isolated, while the rest of us get on with our agenda for bringing*

*about a political settlement via the talks process I am determined that, **come what may**, we will pursue those talks with renewed vigour* (04.01.1994).

come what may (might, will) – *no matter what happens*:

Summing up the results of our analyses of PhUs functioning in the speeches of the two politicians, we can say that the distribution of phraseological units according to structural-semantic types is as follows (the first figure is for Margaret Thatcher, the second is for John Major): verbal – 27:25; substantival – 8:2; adverbial – 2:12; prepositional – 2:4; modal – 1:2; interjectional – 1:0. They have similar properties in terms of their motivation, types of reinterpretation, structure, but John Major's idioms are mostly devoid of expressiveness and emotiveness, are stylistically neutral or elevated in character, are mostly verbal in structure, while Margaret Thatcher's idioms display greater emotiveness and expressiveness, tend to be more colloquial in style, which can be explained gender influence.

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