

THE ROLE OF INTERTEXTUALITY IN AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL DISCOURSE

РОЛЬ ИНТЕРТЕКСТУАЛЬНОСТИ В АМЕРИКАНСКОМ ПРЕЗИДЕНТСКОМ ДИСКУРСЕ

AMERİKA CUMHURBAŞKANLARININ KONUŞMALARINDAKİ İFADE BAĞLANTILARININ ROLÜ

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with functioning of intertextuality signals, such as precedent utterances, in modern political discourse of the USA. The authors study specific characteristics of American presidential discourse and bring some examples of allusions, citations, quotation, etc.

Key words: Intertextuality, precedent text, precedent utterance, political discourse

АННОТАЦИЯ

В статье рассматривается функционирование интертекстов, таких как прецедентные высказывания, в современном политическом американском дискурсе. Авторы рассматривают характерные особенности американского президентского дискурса и приводят примеры аллюзий, цитат и т.д.

Ключевые слова: интертекстальность, прецедентный текст, прецедентное высказывание, политический дискурс.

ÖZET

Makalede günümüz Amerikansındaki siyasi konuşmalarında kullanılan görevsel ifadeler tetkik edilmiştir. Makale yazarları tarafından anılan ifadelerin özellikleri incelenmiş ve ifade parçaları ile imalar örnek olarak gösterilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: ifade bağlantıları, örnek metin, örnek ifade, politik konuşma.

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Though the phenomenon of intertextuality has been extensively studied in recent decades it still has high priority in the study of language and communication. The term “intertextuality” was introduced by Julia Kristeva, a French-Bulgarian philosopher, literary critic and novelist, in 1967. Kristeva was influenced by theories of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the Russian philosopher Michail Bakhtin. It is through the combination of the Saussurean and Bakhtinian theories that Kristeva’s notion of intertextuality emerged. In “Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art” (1980), Kristeva argues that authors do not create their texts from their own mind, but rather compile them from pre-existent texts. Thus, the text becomes “a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text,” in which “several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another” (Kristeva 1980: 36). She argues that, the text is not an isolated object but a product of the interaction between various texts. Kristeva believed that texts cannot be separated from the larger cultural or social textuality on the basis of which they are constructed. Therefore, all texts contain ideological structures expressed through discourse. According to Kristeva, texts do not present clear and stable meanings. They embody society’s conflict over the meaning of words. Thus, intertextuality deals with a text’s existence within society and history. Texts have no unity or unified meaning of their own; they are thoroughly connected to on-going cultural and social processes. A text’s meaning is understood, in Kristeva’s view, as a temporary re-arrangement of elements with socially pre-existent meaning. Meaning then, is simultaneously both ‘inside’ (the reader’s view) and ‘outside’ (society’s influence) the text.

This article studies the role of intertextuality as an instrument of influence in political discourse.

It is a well-known fact that language provides many opportunities to verbalize intentions of those who use it, including politicians. Any politician has a wide range of language means at their disposal to influence and manipulate people. In modern political discourse a lot of politicians with the help of their speechwriters and political image makers use various linguistic technologies to reach their political goals. The process of speechwriting requires not only good knowledge of the natural and social worlds (values, beliefs, assumptions) but also profound knowledge of language as its power of influence is evident and very strong. Such technologies as the simplicity of speech (direct appeal to ordinary people), effective image-making strategies by visual and verbal language means, effective visual products of persuasion (political advertisements and cartoons) help politicians to introduce socially important and culturally oriented concepts for the purpose of keeping their power and reinforcing their influence on public opinion. Different means of language, used in political discourse, have recently become a matter of great interest in linguistics due to their increasing popularity with politicians. Political leaders and their copywriters are currently using various expressive means of language to make their speeches vivid, powerful, persuasive and emotional. Our study shows that these effects can be achieved through the use of intertextuality, which is viewed as an instrument of influence.

Some linguists refer intertextuality to specific characteristics of political discourse together with institutionality, informativity, semantic ambiguity, authoritarianism, dynamism, theatricalism and others (Шейгал/Sheigal, Чудинов/Chudinov). Intertextuality of political discourse is manifested in citation and quotes, precedent utterances, allusions and metaphors. All these means add expressiveness and power to politicians’ speeches,

make them more memorable and emotional, help to be better understood by the audience. In case of relevant comprehension by an addressee, intertextuality helps communicants create common semiotic (or cultural) memory, provides sharing political, ideological and esthetic views. However, we should keep in mind possible communicative failures caused by inadequate background knowledge of the audience.

As it has been mentioned above, one of the main goals of political communication is persuasion which is achieved with help of various means of language. These means can be traced at all language levels: phonetic, grammatical, lexical and textual. Seeking for stronger influence of language, politicians are required to use powerful examples proving the speaker's viewpoint and appealing to listeners' emotions. The speaker's persuasive potential, that is the ability to defend their views in an argumentative dialogue, has a great role in political communication. We'd like to stress here that the use of precedent utterances, familiar to addressees, is believed to be one the most effective means of persuasion. When using precedent utterances, a speaker may refer to a universal truth that requires no proof (e.g. proverbs), or rely upon the credibility of its author. In this case the utterance must be widely familiar to the audience or made a direct reference to ("As Lincoln said ..."). Quotes and other precedent utterances increase the credibility of a speaker and bring to mind of addressees associations and emotions connected to the precedent utterance or situation.

Precedent utterances widely used in political discourse include well-known aphorisms, proverbs, colorful expressions, slogans, mottos, citations, quotations from the Bible, official documents, films, songs, etc. Wide use of transformed and paraphrased proverbs, aphorisms, etc., which can add humorous effect to the utterance of a political leader, is also popular. Transformation of precedent utterances calls for certain associations in the addressee's mind, and their new interpretations are based on failure of expectations. As for universal utterances, their semantics is easy to understand and can be very persuasive, they increase the pragmatic effect of the utterance and add emotions to the speech.

One type of precedent utterances commonly used in political rhetoric is aphorisms of philosophers, writers, and politicians. The basic characteristics of aphorisms are profundity of thought, attribution to an author, formal completeness, figurativeness of expression, original formulation, brevity, genuineness, generalization (Бажалкина 2012: 10). An aphorism used in a certain situation brings to mind another situation or text in the addressee's mind. These precedent texts or situations may contain a prototype phrase and/or some other extra-linguistic information, all these together creating the background of the aphorism. E.g., Theodore Roosevelt, an American president, liked to quote a West-African saying: "Speak softly and carry a big stick, and you will go far". It appeared in his letter to Henry L. Sprague in 1900 and was later to become a trademark description of Theodore Roosevelt's foreign policy – "Big Stick Policy".

The corpus of precedent texts of a certain culture is not completely solidified, but keeps changing all the time. An interesting fact is that it sometimes contains well-known sayings which are widely used in everyday speech but cannot be easily attributed to their original author. E.g., few people know that a popular saying "Time is money" was originally used by US president B. Franklin; now it is used not only in English, but also in German (*Zeit ist Geld*) and in Russian (*Время – деньги*).

Precedent texts and names in political, and especially, in presidential discourse is an important component of rhetoric, as any leader of a country must follow historic, state,

moral and ethical traditions and customs; reference to precedent texts is a way to get familiar with them. American presidents and political thinkers generated a lot of utterances which became precedent in the years to come. E.g., “The chief business of the American people is business” (John C. Coolidge), “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself” (Franklin D. Roosevelt), “I’m not a crook” (Richard Nixon), “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall” (Ronald Reagan), “I want a kinder, gentler nation” (George H.W. Bush), etc. According to research conducted by O.V. Spiridovskiy (Спиридовский 2006), the three most frequently used of them are:

- 1) “A house divided against itself can not stand.” (A. Lincoln)
- 2) “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” (J. F. Kennedy)
- 3) “Four score and seven years ago ...” (Initial phrase of “The Gettysburg Address” by A. Lincoln)

These precedent utterances have been unchangeably repeated by other presidents of the USA in different situations throughout American history and are familiar to all Americans.

American presidents often quote their predecessors in the White House. Citation of former US presidents dominate in the corpus of examples of intertextuality. Intertextuality is often present in the oath taken by all presidents – a fixed rhetoric act of speech. It has been repeated since George Washington and contributed to democratic and legitimate presidential succession. E.g., Bill Clinton appealed to the epoch of Thomas Jefferson in his inaugural address. Mentioning the US third president, one of the Founding Fathers of the nation, who wrote the Constitution, helped Clinton to draw parallels between the present day America and early 19th century: “Thomas Jefferson would say to his nation that to preserve the very foundations of our nation, we would need dramatic change from time to time.” Later, during his visit to united Germany Clinton quotes another US president, Harry S. Truman: “In 1945, at the dawn of the Cold War, President Truman came here to Berlin. He stated then his hope that one day Berlin would be part of what he called a better world, a peaceful world, a world in which all the people will have an opportunity to enjoy the good things in life.”

In 1989, the year of the 200th anniversary of American independence, another US president G. Bush said: “I have just repeated word for word the oath taken by George Washington 200 years ago, and the Bible on which I placed my hand is the Bible on which he placed his. It is right that the memory of Washington be with us today”.

Mentioning and quoting other presidents, writes Spiridovskiy, accounts for 82% of intertextuality examples in US presidential discourse. It becomes obvious that this device helps political leaders to raise trustfulness of the speech, and provide a certain succession of power. Thus, intertextuality in presidential discourse available to mass media and the audience creates generic discourse space shared by both US presidents and people.

It is worth mentioning that one of the characteristic features of political discourse today is its internationality. An important utterance of a big political leader is spread all over the world by mass media within hours. That is why US presidents are often quoted in political discourse of other countries, e.g. Germany. In 1997 German president R. Herzog, while making his speech about breakthrough to the 21 century, quoted John Kennedy: "John F. Kennedy hat einmal gesagt: "Unsere Probleme sind von Menschen gemacht, darum können sie auch von Menschen gelöst werden". Such quotations help politicians prove their point

of view and achieve their goal in communication because precedent texts often have much “authority”. Being well-known in a culture, the precedent text can be accepted as a universal truth by its representatives.

Generating aphoristic utterances has turned into a historic tradition for US presidents and politicians. It is due to general emotional breadth and expressiveness of US political discourse that utterances of American presidents often become so popular: “When the President does it that means that it is not illegal” (Richard Nixon), “Every person deserves to live in a free, open society that respects the rights of all” (G. W. Bush). As for proverbs, according to Vladimir Karasik, a Russian linguist, there is a general tendency to avoid them in American political discourse (Карасик 2002: 22-23). The reason is that proverbs usually carry an element of lecturing and moral teaching, thus, making the addressee feel inexperienced and even guilty. That is why American political leaders often create utterances of aphoristic character themselves. Though some of utterances are made by accident due to a mistake or slip of the tongue, e.g. “A zebra does not change its spots.” (Al Gore) or “Facts are stupid things.” (Ronald Reagan, at the 1988 Republican National Convention, attempting to quote John Adams, who said, “Facts are stubborn things”). This type of utterances is often named after a politician who made them, e.g. “Bushisms” (“Our enemies are innovative and resourceful, and so are we. They never stop thinking about new ways to harm our country and our people, and neither do we.”) or “Obamaisms” (“On this Memorial Day, as our nation honors its unbroken line of fallen heroes – and I see many of them in the audience here today – our sense of patriotism is particularly strong .”).

Being a matter of interest in many spheres of humanities knowledge, political discourse has many definitions. In this article the concept of political discourse is used in the same sense in which Van Dijk (1998), Chilton (1990) and Obeng (1999) apply it. By political discourse they imply a broad category of texts, which include political speeches, propaganda, slogans, etc. among others. Here we’d like to quote Van Dijk who “besides parliamentary debates, bills, laws, government and ministerial regulations, and other institutional forms of text and talk” found such political discourse genres as “propaganda, political advertising, political speeches, ... ballots, and so on” (Van Dijk 1998: 18). Some forms of political propaganda, such advertising, battots, etc, combine both verbal and non-verbal forms of influence. In accordance with the ideas of J. J. Lotman/ Ю. Лотман (1981, 1992), P. Torop/ П. Тороп (1981), J. Kristeva (1980) and some other authors, intertextuality could be traced not only on the verbal, but also on the non-verbal levels, which enables us to view pictures, sculptures, photos, comics and other artifacts of culture as signals of intertextuality (Kristeva, 1980). Thus, “culture in general can be viewed as text” (Лотман 1992: 121-122).

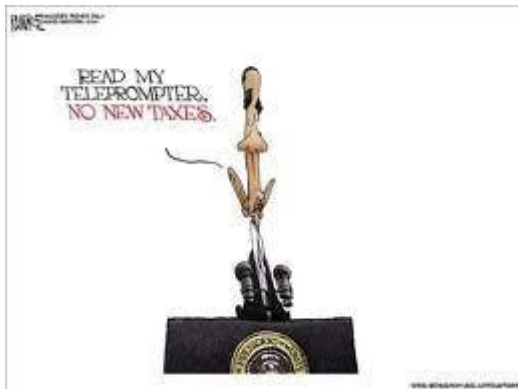
One popular form of propaganda, which has been used in the US since the days of Benjamin Franklin's, is political cartoon. Political cartoons are for the most part composed of two elements: caricature, which parodies the individual, and allusion, which creates the situation or context into which the individual is placed. Here are some examples:



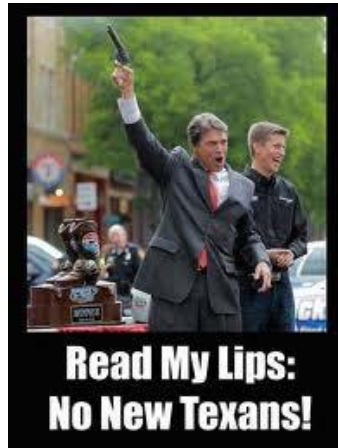
Picture 1



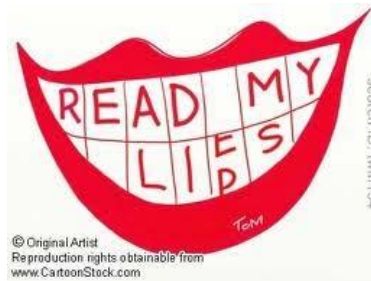
Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4



Picture 5

Some utterances of US presidents can serve as signals of precedent situations, e.g. "Read my lips: no new taxes" is the now-famous phrase spoken by the then American presidential candidate George H. W. Bush at the 1988 Republican National Convention as he accepted the nomination on August 18. Once he became president, however, Bush raised taxes as a way to reduce the national budget deficit. In the 1992 presidential election campaign, Pat Buchanan made extensive use of the phrase in his strong challenge to Bush in the Republican primaries. In the election itself, Democratic nominee Bill Clinton, also pointed to the quotation as evidence of Bush's untrustworthiness, which contributed to Bush's losing his bid for re-election. "Read my lips: no new taxes" has become a precedent utterance, it often symbolizes broken promises and is used in political cartoons to create a humorous effect and to criticize politicians for making statements, sometimes false and untrustworthy (Picture 1, 2, 3). Authors of political cartoons can create humorous effect based on word-play, such as "lips" and "lies" (Picture 5), accusing politicians of breaking their promises; or "taxes" and "Texans", by "Texans" meaning George W. Bush, the 43rd president, who represented the Republican Party, and had served as governor of Texas, and his father George S.W. Bush, Sr., the 41st US president, whose career started in West Texas in (Picture 4).

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