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WORD PLAY AS A MEANS OF MANIPULATION IN THE ENGLISH PRESS

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Abstract

Word play is one of the most controversial phenomena in the modern linguistics. This is due to the fact that it is based on linguocultural realities and stereotypes, which makes it difficult to understand for the representatives of the foreign language culture. However, despite this, there is no doubt that the main function of any pun is attractive. That is why the word play is often used in the various mass media. In this article, the author analyzes the word play from the point of view of one of the means of manipulating public consciousness in the English-language press. In addition, both basic and secondary functions of the English word play are analyzed. The author analyzes the tactics used to manipulate public consciousness.

Keywords

Word play – Manipulation – Press – Linguoculture – Public consciousness

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Introduction

The influence of the mass media on human consciousness nowadays can be hardly overestimated. English mass media plays a basic role in the creation of the person's worldview, and very often even control the life of society. If we assume the wish of the mass media to inform the participants about the events which take place in the certain country and the world in the objective way, the structural features of the communicative process and perception of media messages have a number of effects on the consciousness of the audience. However, the focus of the media on the successful business functions, belonging of the media to certain financial and political groups, the individual psychological features of the staff and a great amount of the factors affecting the content which does not allow nowadays to speak about the objectivity of the mass media.

The mass media is called "the fourth power". It can help not only to create the various stereotypes but also to influence the people, the ideas of the surrounded reality and the order in the world. But it is necessary to mention that the mass media allows any person to learn about the events in the world. Naturally, a person can not verify independently the reliability of factual information and assessments, received through the media, and often even separate one from the other. The consciousness of the person is fulfilled with different stereotypes, kinds of behavior, attitudes and values introduced from the outside reality, which are perceived by the recipient as his own.

With the help of the various methods, content and form of the informational presentation, the mass media gives the presentation of the real world, which constructs the image of reality and gives the audience frames for getting its different aspects. But, the sphere of the influence of the so called "fourth power" applies to the formation of public opinion connected with event, any person and phenomenon. But it should be mentioned, the use of various technologies of information and influence has become a phenomenon of economic competition, political and ideological struggle. So, one of the most dangerous threats in the modern society is the threat of manipulation of mass consciousness.

Such manipulation became possible in the last century, thanks to the massization of our society, the growth of technical improvement of the mass media and its distribution, but the basic factor was the emergence of all types of the mass media. Each of the type has own communication format: press – written speech and visual images; radio – phonetic stream; television – audiovisual way; Internet is an interactive multimedia communicative type. Communication determines the potential of the manipulative influence of the mass media on the consciousness of the recipients. First of all, language manipulation plays a great role in the society.

Currently, there are a lot of means of expressing manipulation at the linguistic level, and one of them is a pun.

In the modern linguistics, the term "pun" is understood ambiguously. Some researchers (such as B.L. Gasparov, M.A. Krivko, V.V. Uchenova and others) understand a pun as a separate type of wordplay, others (for example, J. Dubois, F. Edelin) believe that a word play is a language game. We adhere to the position of those linguists (for example, L.P. Amiri, T.A. Gridina, E.B. Kurganova) who suppose that a word play is a realization of the creative skills of a person and understand this phenomenon as any phonetic or morphological experimentation with a word.

Thus, the relevance of this research can be determined by the linguistic paradigm and lies in the vast interest of the linguists to the problematic sphere “man in the language and language in the man”, within the framework of which a detailed analysis of English mass media texts based on the use of cognitive-semantic and suggestive potential of the pun was carried out.

The object of this research is word play in the English newspaper texts.

The subject of the research is word play as means of the consciousness manipulation.

The main aim of the work is complex study and description of the word play used in the manipulative function in the English press.

The material of the research

The widest use of the word play in the mass media texts is one of the brightest features of the information space nowadays. Many Russian linguistics (for example, S.I. Smetanina) is characterized by the use of the mass media as a source of the material for studying a word play, and a consideration of the word play peculiarities techniques depending on their structure, motivation and functions¹.

In the mass media texts, the word play reveals the full range of its stylistic opportunities that can add to any genre a great source for studying the word play techniques. So, mass media texts belong to the journalistic ones in the kinds of “word play tools”. Their functionality lies in the reflection of the surrounded reality, but not in the interpretation. But, it should be mentioned that mass media is no less valuable for the word play study, mainly its text-forming, pragmatic and discursive aspects.

All the characteristic features of the mass media texts can be presented in the concentrated form. So, they are “transparent” in comparison with other genres in the terms of the functions and linguistic potential of some features (word play as well).

Secondly, the dissemination of some phenomena in the mass media discourse that are not typical for them can't be “redundant” thanks to some special requirements for effective transmission of the important information. Redundancy, for example, of pun, is a manifestation of the latent tendencies of the entire media discourse. The wide penetration of play into news materials makes the researcher think about the “pragmatic task” of the text and how the structure of information in the mass media discourse can be changed due to word play.

So, the choice of mass media texts as research material seems to be relevant and appropriate.

The problem of the research

Here it is necessary to determine the notion of the word play in connection with mass media discourse. As one knows, word play includes different essential components,

¹ L. Yu. Veretenkina, Strategy, tactics and methods of manipulation. Linguoculturological problems of tolerance (Yekaterinburg: Amb, 2001), 44.

such as aestheticism (pleasure from unexpected “surprise”) and conventionality (knowledge of the play rules). Taking into account the first feature, all the signs when information “comes to life”, gets an unexpected sound thanks to certain violation of the language norms, can be attributed to the word play in the analyzed discourse².

One should mention that we are not talking about the “unexpectedness” of the informational content, which by the nature of news itself cannot be “expected” or known.

As for conventionality, it is very difficult to accept it as a criterion for identifying pun techniques. There is no doubt that the apparent non-conventionality of the pun in the news testifies to some one-sided “rules of the pun” known to the sender, but hidden from the recipient of information (at least, the logic of numerous and periodically reproduced assurances of the majority of the media in their objectivity, impartiality, etc. setting on the “embellishment” of information, including through the word play). That is why, we agree with the researches who suppose that “violation of the convention” is a certain “signal” for any researcher who sets the task of identifying the discursive functions of the word play, the source of which should be sought in the pragmatic intentions of the information sender³.

Main types of the wordplay

Analyzing the problems of the word play, the most scientists turn to various linguistic means, classifying them due to the language level: phonetical, lexical, morphological, syntactical (grammatical). Let’s study word play at these levels in detail, on the material of media texts.

We will restrict ourselves to just a few examples typical of the mass media publications:

- graphic wordplay – «*\$ocial club*», «*Merr¥ Christmas*», «*@ your fingertips*». Here we see an impregnation of units of other semiotic systems – punctuation marks and symbols. Thus, a pun is created by the homophony of the phonetic embodiment @ and the preposition at);

- phonetic and word-building play. Creation of the pun by means of full or partial coincidence of the phonetic composition of words (using alliteration and assonance) with similar lexical meaning and morphemic repetition, which leads to rhyming constructions that are most typical for the English language: *Plots & Ploys*, *Notable & Quotable* – suffixation, *Corporate tax in America: How to stop the inversion perversion*– preffixation).

- syntactical word play with compatibility - *Refugees were hooked by a scandal*,

- a lexical word play based on the polysemy – *CNN lost its face*.

If we analyse such linguistic means of word play from the point of view of the text structure, then, we are talking about microtext organization of language means.

² O. S. Issers, *Speech impact* (Moscow: Flinta, 2009), 167.

³ I. V. Dimante, “Tools of a professional communicator (methods of speech influence)”, *Communication research* Vol: 4 num 6 (2015): 52-64.

As for the macrotext representation of the word play and its text-forming potential, it has been less studied. This problem can be found in the works of S.I. Smetanina, who singles out such types of the word play as “play with language” and “play with a real event”. In the first case, it comes about the level of the linguistic means, other words, about microtext elements. In the second, the techniques of “decorating”: putting forward their own versions of fantasies that compensate for the lack of information; illustration of the reality, fantasy; constructing of “your own” plot by making accent on the events that seem important from your point of view; attraction attention to the precision information, etc⁴.

Heading and its main functions

There is no doubt that the headlines, which are the “face” of any publication, play a huge role in the presentation of the material. Headings can fulfill the following functions:

- to attract the attention of the recipient;
- to identify the main item of the article;
- to note an ideological trend,
- to give an assessment,
- to manipulate public consciousness⁵.

Headlines can be used in the persuasive function at the moment of the attention attraction. Also, they influence the opinion of the potential recipient, can cause the certain reaction of the readers. Speech manipulation is used with the aim of “hidden introduction into the addressee's psyche of goals, desires, intentions, attitudes that do not coincide with those that the addressee has at the moment”⁶. “Probably, from the moment of its inception, language is used for the purpose of influence and manipulation. And our ancestor, who guessed to use the word as a tool of influence was, without any doubt, one of the first manipulators”⁷.

Wordplay in the headings

The most important item of any text is its headings. As for the mass media discourse, headlines include various linguistic means, which is of great interest for the analysis. Language is sensitive to different changes in the society, and its means are used in the mass media discourse for public opinion transformations.. The most widespread linguistic means that manipulate the public consciousness is word play. After analyzing the language material, we were able to identify several types of pun, the main function of which is to manipulate public opinion. The following types of the word play can be singled out.

⁴ L. Yu. Veretenkina, Strategy, tactics and methods of manipulation... 12.

⁵ G. A. Koprina, Speech manipulation (Moscow: Flinta, 2008), 90.

⁶ O. I. Ismailova, “Usage of the wordplay as tools of information and psychological warfare”, Modern science: actual problems of theory and practice. Humanitarian sciences num 2 (2017): 82-84.

⁷ S. I. Smetanina, Media text in the system of culture: dynamic processes in the language and style of journalism at the end of the 20th century (Saint-Petersburg: Publishing house of Mikhailov V.A., 2002), 71.

- A word play based on homophones. Such word play is characterized by the ambiguity between word and its meaning. In the headline *“Waiting to DIY”*, the word “DIY” is a homophone to the lexeme “die”, while in the sentence above “DIY” is an abbreviation for the expression *“do it yourself”*.

- A word play based on polysemy. Such word play is based on the fact that the same word has several different meanings that can be related to each other.

For example: *“Two tribes go to war, and neither the red nor the blue leader is safe”*.

In the Oxford Dictionary, the notion the lexeme “tribe” is explained as a social group of people in the society. The word “safe” is a polysemantic word that has the following meanings: reliable, safe, guaranteed. Having read the article, it is clear that two tribes are two political parties. The red color symbolizes the ideology of the workers' party, and blue represents the Tories.

- A pun based on phraseology. In any culture there are set expressions, phraseological units, proverbs, sayings that characterize the stereotypes of the linguistic culture.

For example, the title *Join the kew for the bloom with a phew* refers to the famous novel by E.M. Forster “A room with a view”. In addition, the words “kew” and “phew” are rhymed, and here a homophone is the basis of the word play. The rhythm in the headline shows the tone of the whole article.

All these types of the pun can be used for the public consciousness manipulation.

Let's analyze the following headline. In the headline to the article about V.V. Putin, they say that he has the ability for a unique historical restoration, in the fact that he captured a young woman, brought her to the prison, and she was found guilty and the author used the name of the national heroine of France Jeanne d'Arc in comparison with the well known Nadezhda Savchenko. The title of the article is:

Putin has created a 21st century Joan of Arc manipulates the mind of the reader, imposing his own idea of reality and creating a negative image of Putin.

Another title is:

Still waters run deep: the EU Intel crisis, explores the nature and causes of the crisis.

The proverb “still waters run deep” lies in the basis of the example. The article causes caution from the reader's point of view. A paraphrase of the famous proverb and saying is used as a way of the word play creation in the following headline *“After those foreign follies, home is where my wallet is*. In the usual case, it sounds as *“home is where my heart is”*. In this example, the author used the word “wallet” to demonstrate the existed stereotypes of the society. The next technique is phonetic word play. Nowadays, rhymed words are used as one of the ways to attract readers' attention to the various headlines and manipulate the public consciousness. This technique can be found in the following sentence: *“Bid to save Helter-Skelter”*. The rhymed word *helter-skelter* means disorder, turmoil, confusion.

For a word play, words with a strong connotative meaning can also be used. The main function of connotation is to manipulate consciousness. Words having an evaluative connotation and carrying an emotional load that go beyond their first meaning can create some evaluations.

For example, the headline “*Genius rev butchered at church*” creates a gloomy and pessimistic mood. The lexeme “*butchered*” means “bloodshed, slaughter”. When this lexeme is related to a person, it has the meaning of the violence, implying that the killer perceives the victim as an animal. In the example “*Are we doomed to slow growth?*” the lexeme “*doomed*” has a negative connotation which is associated with the hopelessness.

In many headlines, one can notice the metaphor as in the following example, “*More water money goes down the drain*”. The phrase “*to go down the drain*” refers to water and means – “*to flow out through the drain*”, but the figurative meaning is that all the efforts were wasted, and money was lost. Let’s give one more example. In the headline of the article “*Millions more Russians living in poverty as economic crises bites*”, the word “*bites*” evokes negative emotions in the addressee and creates a pessimistic mood. Another headline: “*Can Angela Merkel prevent Europe being eaten away at its core?*” reflects to the criticality of the situation.

As it is seen, manipulative influence can easily change the public consciousness, regulating various relations both in the country and abroad, even leading to the wars and awful struggle. Such influence is usually directed at the people in such a way that it can substitute the ethical meanings of the “cultural core”⁸.

Speech strategies of the mass media

Having analyzed various articles in the modern British press, we were able to identify the following main types of speech (including manipulative) influence, which can be designated as speech strategies:

- speech strategy based on images;
- speech strategy based on sign systems;
- speech strategy based on different recipients roles;
- speech strategy based on the world values⁹.

Sometimes, it is possible to single out some other tactics which can be found out less frequent. For example, such strategies as:

- speech strategy on the addressee's personality exploiting;
- speech strategy for decreasing or increasing.

⁸ A. D. Vasiliev, *Word Games: Manipulative Operations in Media Texts: Monograph* (Saint-Petersburg: Zlatoust, 2013), 76.

⁹ O. S. Issers, *Speech impact...* 65.

All these strategies can be found out in the mass media discourse. In many cases word play lies in the core of the mentioned strategies. Being the basis of the strategies, word play is able to change the readers' attitude to the events of the reality and form a certain emotional mood (positive or negative) of the recipient.

As the theme of the article is the word play as the means of the consciousness manipulation, it is necessary to analyze some speech tactics which can manipulate the public opinion and consciousness:

1) the tactic of "revaluation", in other words, making the accent on the secondary events but not on the main ones.

2) the tactics of the goals substitution, when the addressee's wishes and interests are put the first;

3) the tactic of "mask", when the addressee can be found in the role of somebody else¹⁰.

Let's look at the following example: *Click for candy: How online retailers boost impulse buys.*

Here, the author uses the tactic of "revaluation" with the help of the parceled construction. The author points out the addressee's gullibility thanks to the use of such phrase "click for candy" in the main part of the construction.

Let's analyze one more example: *The train of possibilities. About the rights and benefits of train passengers.*

As one can see, this example is based on the use of the word play as well. The author influences the reader with the help of the necessary accents made by the word play. In this sentence, we see the use of the homonyms "train" as a vehicle and "train" in the figurative meaning (a great amount of something)¹¹.

It is possible to analyze one more example based on the word play which can be a special means of the public consciousness manipulation.

High stakes game. Trump: first 200 hours in power. Bluffing or Banking?

Here, the author uses the tactics of revaluation, doubting the seriousness of Donald Trump's intentions, comparing his rules with card games. The effect of manipulative influence is achieved by the use of such colloquial lexical units as "to bluff" and "to bank". With the help of these lexemes, the author implements the strategy to decrease, making the accent on Donald Trump's connection with the gambling.

Here there are some examples based on the "mask" tactic:

Fillon payment inquiry: What you need to know.

¹⁰ D. P. Le Havre, Fundamentals of the theory of communication (Moscow: Yurayt, 2016), 90.

¹¹ A. N. Baranov, Introduction to applied linguistics (Moscow: Editorial URSS, 2001), 102.

In the sentence above, the recipient acts as the leader, limiting the common amount of the information. It can be proved by such expression as “*need to know*”. In the article, the author describes the scandal with the fictitious employment of François Fillon's wife, who was silent concerning his previous merits in political activity. An additional effect was achieved by the premise, creating intrigue, and the interest of the viewer was aroused with the help of the expression “*what you need to know*”.

Election Tour de France: What French voters really think.

In this utterance, the author reveals all the details of the election to the addressee. The following linguistic means him: the word “*elections*”, the phrase “*what the voters really think*”. By the way, the addressee puts the special accents on the important information, with the help of the title of the most prestigious world race “Tour de France” used in the main part of the message to show the scale of the survey conducted along this route. With the help of this tactic, another strategy can be used, for example, a strategy based on life values:

Survive a paycheck. Why do doctors have high incomes only on paper?

The title of the article implements the emotionally expressive function of the parceled structure due to the use of the lexeme “*survive*” in the main part, which influences the reader. Parceling in the form of a question is aimed at attracting the attention to the addressee, showing with the help of the set-expression the real things concerning the doctors' wages.

Let's take another example:

France's Fillon: From popular to populist?

In this example, the author uses the “putting on the mask” tactic, identifying himself with the interlocutor and creating the illusion of dialogue by asking the question “*from popular to populist?*” In addition to the various expressive constructions, the authors use paronymy as a manipulative linguistic means: popular and populist. Despite the similar features of these lexemes, they have various connotations: lexeme “popular” is a positive one, and lexeme “populist” is a negative one.

Russia on Ukraine's Eurovision: Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Here, the author uses the so called tactics of goals substitution with the help of parceling construction setting the subject of the utterance “*to Russia on Ukraine's Eurovision*”. The second part of the sentence presents the alternative question “*should I stay or should I go*”, which prompts the reader to take one side or the other. The author puts the addressee before a choice, knowing the answer.

Conclusion

The analysis of the material allowed to identify the speech strategies used by the authors of the English-speaking mass media to provide manipulative influence: a strategy for a decrease / increase, a strategy based on an appeal to life values. The following tactics are used to implement these strategies successfully:

- the tactic of revaluation,
- the tactic of goals substitutions,
- the tactic of “mask”.

It can be said that, the tactic of “mask” is the most widespread in the English-speaking mass media. An analysis of the examples in this article showed that the mass media, as a rule, reduce information with the help of the word play. The word play is one of the most controversial phenomena in the modern linguistics. It can be explained by the fact that it is based on various linguocultural realities and stereotypes, which complicates its understanding by the representatives of the foreign language culture. However, despite this, there is no doubt that the main function of any word play is attractive, that is, attracting attention. That is why the word play is often used in various mass media.

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