

UDC 808.51

Basic emotions as specific group of manipulation targets in political discourse

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Abstract

The article studies basic human emotions of mass recipients as effective manipulation targets in the political discourse (by the example of some contemporary British political leaders' pre-election propaganda speeches posted on their official websites in the internet). Thus, basic human emotions of *anger (or indignation)*, *fear (or alarm)*, *joy (or pleasure)*, *trust (or acceptance)* and *disgust (or rejection)* are described in the article concerning their manipulative potential which is based on their instinctive origin. The theoretical part of the study is based on the ethological¹ approach which means that some purely linguistic phenomena and those of human speech behaviour are studied as being genetically or instinctively conditioned. Such verbal means as nominative lexical units, associative lexical units, metaphor and simile being used in the corresponding intentional elements (more often they are informative intentional elements) of some speech acts are analyzed in the article. The main method of study is intentional analysis. The analysis of political messages shows that basic emotions of trust, fear, disgust, joy and anger are quite effective manipulation targets as speech acts with corresponding perlocutionary effects are very often produced by politicians. Verbal means of manipulation in this case are nominative lexical units, associative lexical units, metaphor and simile.

For citation

Lyulina A.V. (2017) Basic emotions as specific group of manipulation targets in political discourse. *Kul'tura i tsivilizatsiya* [Culture and Civilization], 7 (3A), pp. 87-94.

Keywords

Speech manipulation, speech producer, mass recipients, perlocutionary effect, manipulation target, basic emotion, nominative lexical unit, associative lexical unit, metaphor, simile.

¹ Human ethology is the branch of science which studies genetically and instinctively conditioned behaviour of people.

Introduction

Human emotions can be considered a very interesting object of study for scientists of many fields. Recently emotional behavior of mass recipients has become a productive phenomenon for linguists who are engaged in ethological aspect of speech manipulation in the political discourse.

There are many different classifications of emotions nowadays as there is no universal opinion of scholars on the nature and functions of human emotional reactions. Nevertheless, all well-known classifications contain a specific group of emotions which are defined by their authors as basic ones.

Basic (primary) emotions are genetically conditioned phenomena which have a natural basis. It means they are common with all human beings no matter what nation, culture or social group they belong to. Scientists distinguish between the following basic emotions of mass recipients: *anger*; *fear*; *joy*; *trust*; *disgust* [Gray, 1985, 99-112; Ortony, Turner, 1990, 315-331; Shaver et al., 2001, 26-56].

All these emotions can be productive manipulation targets in the political discourse. Manipulation of basic emotions is quite effective thanks to their simplifying function [Leont'ev, 2002, 86]: emotions make the process of decision-making much easier through forcing mass recipients to act without thinking, without considering all pros and cons. So, basic emotions possess both features of effective manipulation targets. They are *collective* (which means all the representatives of mass recipients have the same emotions) and *universal* (which means all the representatives of mass recipients have the same reaction to this or that emotional stimulus).

The most important speech producer's task in case of manipulating of recipients' basic emotions in the political discourse is forming fixed associations of the following pattern: "positive basic emotions = the producer's political party" and "negative basic emotions = the opponent's political party".

The peculiarities of using verbal means while manipulating mass recipients in the political discourse are as follows.

1. Fear (alarm)

Basic emotion of fear appeared in the evolution process for protecting of human organism from all the possible dangers of the primal life [Shcherbatykh, Nozdrachev, www]: the scientific experiments show the situations which are connected with sufferings and pain stick to people's memory rather quickly and fear which arouse in these situations make people avoid them afterwards.

Peace and safety are emotional states, which are opposite to fear. Therefore, the main mechanism of manipulation here is forming the following pairs of associations: "the producer's opponent = the source of fear and sufferings" and "the producer = safety and rescuing from fear". Nominative lexical units (*fear*, *alarm*, *panic* and others), associative lexical units (*danger*, *risk*, *death*, *war*, *bomb* and others) and corresponding metaphors are used in this case. For example:

a) This report puts clear blue water between us and Gordon Brown.

It is *hope versus fear*.

The current Prime Minister wants you *to fear* the future, reign in your aspirations, share his cautious, suspicious view of the world and cling to Nurse Brown *for fear* of finding something worse!

But that has never been the British Way.

The *threats* to our planet from Climate Change are unprecedented.

Within our lifetime, the consequences of global warming are potentially *catastrophic*.

But we do have a choice.

We can be players on the field, looking for solutions... [Barker, www].

This manipulative message is based on the explicit verbal association *hope versus fear*. Basic emotion of fear is associated with the opponent's reluctance to change the ecological situation (described with associative lexical units *threat, catastrophic*) which can result in recipients' losing their environment. The producer's party is shown as willing to protect the recipients' environment actively (metaphor *players on the field*) in comparison with passive opponents.

b) It was only a year ago that the world was looking over a precipice and Britain was *in danger*. I knew that unless I acted decisively and immediately, the recession could descend into a *great depression* with millions of people's jobs and homes and savings *at risk* [Brown, Speech to Labour..., www].

In the example above the speech producer shows himself as a rescuer of mass recipients from the state of fear and depression (Britain was *in danger* – *associative lexical unit*). He associates positive emotions of mass recipients with his party and their negative emotions with the opponents' one.

2. Trust (acceptance)

It is not a secret that a politician whom recipients trust can have much chance during the elections. While manipulating of basic emotion of trust, quite often the conceptions of *truth* and *lie* are used. Thus, the producer's party is shown as a group of people who try to avoid dishonesty regarding mass recipients. On the contrary, the opponent's party is demonstrated as a group of liars.

According to Plutchik's theory, emotion of trust (or acceptance) appeared when primitive people took wholesome food and drinks [Plutchik, 1962, 8]. Thus, we can suppose that manipulating of this basic emotion has the following associative patterns: "the producer = benefit for mass recipients" and "the producer's opponent = uselessness for mass recipients". For example:

a) How do we get the economy moving? How do we get growth going? How do we make sure that growth is sustainable?

And here there's a really big choice.

Labour say the economy will collapse unless they keep on wasting your money.

Then, when things start getting better they want to impose a thwacking great jobs tax.

The Liberal Democrats say: well, they say a lot of things.

First they said that the call from business to stop the jobs tax is nauseating.

Then they said that the jobs tax is actually damaging and needs to be stopped, but they haven't got a clue how to do it.

They're like a pair of designer flip-flops that fall apart after the first five minutes.

We say: this jobs tax will kill the recovery.

Because here's something the other parties always forget.

Government isn't the same thing as the economy [Cameron, Labour's jobs..., www].

The first part of the message contains the comparison of opponents regarding their being useful or not for mass recipients. The economic position of Labour is shown as useless and not deserving of trust. The viewpoint of the Liberal Democrats is to seem unclear (*well, they say a lot of things*) and not deserving of trust as well. The perlocutionary effect is intensified with simile (*They're like a pair of designer flip-flops that fall apart after the first five minutes*).

3. Anger (indignation)

In psychologists' opinion, the cause for anger is any obstacle which prevents people from satisfying their current needs [Леонтьев, 2002, 143]. Besides, anger is a natural reaction to offence, outrage or injustice. So, there are many associations which can cause mass recipients' anger ("the producer's opponent = insult", "the producer's opponent = restrictions of any kind" and others). Verbal means of forming these associations are various. For example:

a) For years, decades, *politicians have been treating the public like mugs*, pretending that we have all the answers. Just give us some power we say, let us pass a few more laws, issue a few more regulations, spend a bit more of your money – and it will all get miraculously better. But change doesn't work like that. If it did, we wouldn't need an election because we'd be living in utopia by now. If this whole leave-it-all-to-government approach had all the answers, *Wales wouldn't have been left so far behind, with the highest rates of unemployment and child poverty of any country in the UK*. No. The idea that change comes from government alone is a lie. A big lie [Cameron, Welsh..., www].

The perlocutionary effect of anger in this example is achieved through pointing at the opponents' offensive treatment of mass recipients (*treating the public like mugs*). Giving information about the opponents which touches national pride of mass recipients is also aimed at getting the perlocutionary effect of anger and indignation (*with the highest rates of unemployment and child poverty of any country in the UK*).

4. Disgust (rejection)

The origin of this basic emotion is quite evident: it appeared from primitive gustatory sense and the sense of hunger [Izard, 2009, 149] and is connected with the basic reaction of refusing anything harmful for a body. This basic emotion is often used by the producers of political messages for creating a negative opponents' image. Such verbal means as nominative lexical units (*disgust, detest, repugnant, repulsive* and others) and some corresponding associative lexical units are used to achieve this perlocutionary effect. For example:

a) Every child born in Britain this year will be staggering along under Gordon Brown's debt. £17,000 each to be precise, which will take them decades to pay off. I believe there is something *morally repugnant* about this Labour Government sacrificing tomorrow for the political convenience of today. And, I believe, so does the vast majority of this country. For the first time in generations, parents are looking at their children and questioning if they will have a better life than they themselves had [Cameron, Labour's Debt..., www].

b) The Chief Constable of Cheshire said earlier this week that anti-social behaviour in Britain is "out of control". And most people agree. A recent poll showed that half of British people feel more frightened on the streets than they did a decade ago. And it's not just the fear that matters – it's the damage to our quality of life. *Vomit* and broken glass in the town centres. Graffiti and *litter and urine* in the stairways of blocks of flats. Fly-tipping in country lanes.

Aggression and foul language on the train and the bus ... general disrespect... all the little acts of aggression and ugliness that people have to put up with in the course of a day. Is all this an inevitable feature of life? I don't believe so [Cameron, Youth crime..., www].

5. Joy (pleasure)

In the political discourse the perlocutionary effect of joy is achieved when mass recipients are promised what they need, when their merits are recognized or they are being praised. For example:

a) In particular I would like to thank the members of the Luton Commission on Community Cohesion, which is *a superb example* of the way in which a community can work together. The town has remained true to its original vision of 'sticking together', working across age, religious and ethnic boundaries to promote *a tolerant, strong, vibrant community*. That is why I think Luton is the *perfect place to set out my vision for an open, confident Britain* [Clegg, www].

The perlocutionary effect of joy can be caused by the speech acts of praise or gratitude like in the example above. The producer admires the place where he makes his speech and uses some epithets with positive connotation (*superb, tolerant, strong, vibrant*).

b) We are *proud* of our country and the way it has changed since 1997. It is just too easy to forget. Our public services were a byword for decline; today they have been transformed. Our large cities were reeling from two savage recessions; today, despite the global economic crisis, they have a renewed prosperity and civic pride. People were paid £1 an hour; today the minimum wage and tax credits provide the dignity of a living income. The welfare state simply did not understand working women and families. Today, with family-friendly working and better childcare it has at last begun to do so [Brown, Foreword..., www].

This manipulative message is a sequence of assertive speech acts which contain information about the results of the producers work. As these results are clear and pleasant (We are *proud* of our country and the way it has changed since 1997), the necessary associative link is created.

Summary

The analysis of political messages shows that basic emotions of trust, fear, disgust, joy and anger are quite effective manipulation targets as speech acts with corresponding perlocutionary effects are very often produced by politicians. Verbal means of manipulation in this case are nominative lexical units, associative lexical units, metaphor and simile.

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Основные эмоции как особая группа объектов манипуляции в политическом дискурсе

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Аннотация

В статье исследуются базовые эмоции массовых реципиентов как эффективные объекты манипуляции в политическом дискурсе (на примере предвыборных пропагандистских выступлений некоторых современных британских политических лидеров, размещенных на их официальных сайтах в Интернете). Основные эмоции: гнев (или негодование), страх (или тревога), радость (или удовольствие), доверие (или принятие) и отвращение – описаны в статье в аспекте их манипуляционного потенциала, который основан на их инстинктивном происхождении. Теоретическая часть исследования основана на этиологическом подходе, который означает, что некоторые чисто лингвистические явления и речевое поведение человека изучаются как явления генетические или инстинктивные. В статье анализируются такие вербальные средства, как номинативные лексические единицы, ассоциативные лексические единицы, метафора и сравнение, которые используются в соответствующих интенциональных элементах (чаще это информативные интенциональные элементы) некоторых речевых актов. Основным методом исследования является интенционный анализ.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

Люлина А.В. Основные эмоции как особая группа объектов манипуляции в политическом дискурсе // Культура и цивилизация. 2017. Т. 7. № 3А. С. 87-94.

Ключевые слова

Речевые манипуляции, массовые получатели, перлокутивный эффект, объект манипуляции, базовые эмоции, номинативная лексическая единица, ассоциативная лексическая единица, метафора, сравнение.

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