

Constitutive Features of the Russian Political Discourse in Ecolinguistic Aspect¹

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Abstract

The article offers a comparative description of typological mechanisms used in political communicative practice and methods of verbal explication of its axiological and symbolic constituents determining universal mental features of individual/collective consciousness. The research position based on a systemic multilevel analysis of the component structure of discourse facilitates the identification and characterization of linguistic and sociocultural dominants of political interaction organized by a certain language system, with semiotic and literary genre specifics of legitimate communicative acts taken into account.

The methodological concept, aimed at modeling institutional interactions in the context of ecological compatibility/toxicity of the transmission of ethno-sociocultural components, allowed the authors to characterize the ways and mechanisms of representation and transformation of the sign structure of political communication and determine the algorithms of verbal and discursive behavior. The combination of methods applied in discourse analysis, linguistic and cognitive projection, linguistic and cultural interpretations and functional-pragmatic consideration of text units made it possible to identify and qualify linguistic and semiotic elements of legitimate/illegitimate political practices and to carry out ecolinguistic typology of basic linguistic components of political communication.

The results of the study indicate a special communicative range of Russian political discourse, with language diffusion/re-contextualization, persuasive techniques, semiotic consolidation of institutional reversion, various verbal indicators of social asymmetry (from metaphorization, euphemization, nominalization to the tactics of disintegration and manipulation) as key markers. They not only actualize linguistic and cultural resources of ideologically charged discursive practices, but also

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significantly expand the area of possible communication risks. Modern political logosphere as a part of the ecosystem, synergetically included in all spheres of human communication, forms new contextual concepts, assessment stereotypes, verbal behavior norms (often restricting norms) for all subjects included in it and communicative traditions of the universe as a whole.

Keywords: Political Discourse; Ecolinguistics; Legitimate Political Practices; Social and Linguocultural Dominants; Communicative Risks.

1. Introduction

Modern geopolitical conditions distinguished by the processes of migration and integration actualize numerous problems in the semiotic-semasiological arrangement of social communicative system – from outlining the principles of its axiological components' formation in a bi-/multicultural or bi-/multilingual environment to the description of verbal behavior rules, typical for a particular language universe. This explains why a multi-aspect and a determinant nature of the factors (ranging from ethno-historical to psychological), that trigger language formation, becomes the subject of redefinition for philosophers, philologists, political and cultural scientists, etc.

The expansion of information field and the consolidation of the Internet as the main communication channel have had a significant impact on the functioning of a natural language (in a broad sense) in a modern linguocultural situation. The global virtual space not only demonstrates a new type of verbal relations, characterized by the complication of its semantic sphere and connotative elements, but also determines the vector of the rule-making process. The fusion of Russian literary language with sociolects and colloquial speech, accompanied by a simultaneous activation of English language units, results in a clear narrowing of the scope of Russian literary language. Codified variants are being replaced by the so-called “information language norms, in which the form is of secondary importance and orthoepical, lexical, grammatical and stylistic errors are not taken into account” (Bozhenkova, Bozhenkova, & Romanova, 2017, p. 69). Public speeches carried out by individuals with an insufficient level of language competence (which the audience often takes for a model!) lead to the “erosion” of rules of verbal behavior and speech aesthetics and create a new reality that requires a competent evaluation and interpretation.

Thus, the emergence of *ecolinguistics*, a new field of study, formed at the intersection of environmental and linguistic issues, becomes particularly logical. Its research subjects are: (1) the state of the language as a semiotic system affected by various extralinguistic factors that influence social linguistic consciousness and speech culture; (2) means of protection of the language (as a component of

communicative interaction) from a negative impact and its simultaneous preservation, enrichment and development. It is noteworthy that the reasons for the formation of ecolinguistics and the problems it solves are universal (relevant for any language community), since the axiological dominant of the new scientific field focuses on “the preservation of the identity of an ethnos, moral well-being of its society and national security of the state” (Bernatskaya, 2014, p. 28).

On the one hand, this methodological position turns linguistics from an analytical descriptive science into a practice-oriented science, focused not only on the characterization of linguistic representation of social interpersonal/public activities and problems of non-linguistic reality, but also on the identification of social and communicative technologies for resolving the issues of unjustified (taking linguistic multifunctionality into account) verbal behavior. On the other hand, it forms a wide range of tasks that imply a specific research view. “The peculiarity of the approach to language and speech facts from the standpoint of ecolinguistics is their social assessment based on historical conditions and trends in the development of this language, system and norm factors, sociocultural, political, economic, ethical and aesthetic criteria” (Skovorodnikov, 2013, pp. 207-208).

The range of ecology-related problems the Russian language singled out by various academicians is undoubtedly voluminous. Moreover, they cannot be static, because the ecolinguistic situation itself is a diffuse phenomenon. Nonetheless, despite the absence of a unified metalanguage apparatus and a large variety of nominations, the following statements are clearly distinguished:

- lexical and semantic loss (primarily due to archaization of literary lexis and the “deposition” of a considerable number of paremiological units from native speakers’ language consciousness) and simultaneous retrieval of historic lexical units, i.e. words and idioms that resume functioning in the language with a change/expansion of their semasiological component;
- speech pollution due to the intrusion of jargon^{1/} and vulgar words (especially in the media) and an abundant application of foreign verbal units (usually of English or American origin), which are perceived as barbarisms;

¹ Undoubtedly, in some cases, the exclusion of jargon vocabulary from journalistic repertoire and colloquial speech is impractical since its expression and precision turn out to be irreplaceable by other means. Sometimes, however, the authors demonstrate a lack of “sense of proportion”.

- erosion of ethic and aesthetic norms in speech communication due to a certain value loss of Russian (and not only Russian) classical literature and coexistence of dialectically unrelated phenomena (for example, invective/obscene speech units and pretentious statements in general) in a large number of modern texts;
- reassessment and defamation of verbal signs that represent national symbols (public authority, historic victories, ethno-cultural involvement, etc.);
- manipulative use of sociocultural terms and connotative ambivalence of the transmission of ideologically charged units, determined by latent goals of audience management rather than by communicants' principled political attitudes;
- conceptualization, reproduction and often monetization of discursive practices that have a harmful impact on society's world outlook, values and behavior models, especially among younger generations (involving discursive practices of radical and criminal communities, discourses, associated with the promotion of suicide, child molestation, etc.).

Obviously, the range of ecolinguistic problems listed above covers all spheres of human life. However, they become especially apparent in the space of political communication, since, being an integral part of the ethnic culture of any society, political communication explicates a multilevel system of ideas, objectives and interests pursued by the state.

In a broad sense, the word "policy" refers to an action program of a public institution or human activities aimed at managing something or somebody (organization policy, family policy, education policy, etc.). This lexeme can be also used to describe a set of actions and measures applied to achieve certain goals. Thus, modern political field becomes a "conglomerate" of diverse phenomena; it includes political actors and communities; institutions and organizations; normative subsystems, traditions and rituals; political culture and ideology, methods and techniques of political activity, information means, etc. However, the absolute verbalization is their core and unifying feature: transforming the linguistic material accumulated by the society, the policy can be carried out only in the process of language interaction, the task of which is to create a certain picture of the world in this society.

The nature of political language remains unknown to date. What metaphors and proverbs does the modern political language use? What linguistic and extralinguistic factors have a negative (or positive) effect on speakers' linguistic consciousness? What discursive practices represent it and how is it transforming? Finally, is it possible today to talk about a special communicative range of Russian political discourse of the XXI century? These general questions in the aspect of ecolinguistic views determine the need to describe the essence of modern political discourse, to identify its categorical units and to formulate a number of linguopragmatic laws, which we aspire to extrapolate to the solution of environmental problems of the language as a whole.

2. Literature Review

Political interaction as a social and communicative sphere, where the main motive for development is the struggle for power, becomes the focus of Russian scientific interest in the last third of the 20th century, when post-perestroika innovations in the Russian language acquired the character of ethno-cultural features. Today, the connection between ideology and language, mythologization and metaphorization of political communication and verbal manipulation are attracting the attention of an increasing number of domestic and foreign linguists¹. It should be highlighted that a number of academicians believe that political activity is in essence no more than linguistic activity (Dieckmann, 1981; Ealy, 1981), whereas in modern political science there is a tendency to consider language as a component of the political field rather than means to reflect political reality. This is due to the fact, that politics, unlike other areas of human activity, is clearly discursive in its nature.

As well as in the situation with the definition of discourse as a whole, academicians' attempts to give a correct definition to the concept of *political discourse* led to the emergence of a large number of definitions. Political discourse was described as "the discourse of politicians implemented in the form of government documents, parliamentary debates, party programs, politicians' speeches" (Van Dijk, 2013, p. 47); "the combination of all speech acts used in political discussions, as well as the rules of public politics set by tradition and verified by experience" (Baranov, & Kazakevich, 1991, p. 8); "a specific, explicitly pragmatic kind of ideological discourse" (Sorokin, 1997, p. 57); one of the fields of applied linguistics, the essence of which is expressed by the formula "discourse = sublanguage + text + context",

¹ See works of Altunian, A.G.; Budayev, E. V; Karasik, V.I.; Klochko, N.N.; Lissan, E.; Levin, Yu.I.; Norman, B.Yu.; Olyanich, A.V.; Chudinov, A.P.; Lakoff, G.; Anderson, S.R.; Benoit, W.L.; Wodak, R.; Wee L. and others.

where “text” stands for “the text under development + previously created texts”¹, and the context includes the situational and cultural components (Sheigal, 2001, p.15). Moreover, in modern linguistics, some researchers (Chudinov; Lazar, etc.) use the term *political discourse* as given a priori; others (Baranov; Sheigall; Van Dijk; Wodak, etc.) use it as synonymous for *political communication*, *political language*, *language of politics*; and still others (Parshin; Stepanov, etc.) refuse to recognize its solely linguistic meaning. The ambiguity in academicians’ opinions is explained by the fact that political discourse is an extremely complex object for research, since “it lies at the intersection of different disciplines, namely political science, social psychology and linguistics, and is associated with the analysis of the form, objectives and content of discourse, used in certain (“political”) situations” (Demyankov, 2001, p. 118). The semantic structure of the lexeme “politics” consists of the following components: political events, views and beliefs; principles of behavior; political course, i.e. ideas and activities carried out in order to gain power in the country or abroad (Kara-Murza, 2005). At the same time, “polity” means the form of government, social or political system and its arrangement (Habermas, 2001). Finally, it refers to the art or science of influencing ideas and beliefs of individuals or society as a whole. It is due to the complexity of the semasiological field of the lexeme, that today we are observing a multi-vector nature of political discourse analysis, including the study of totalitarian language; the study of verbal facts containing “politics” as a component in the Russian language in the late 20th century; the study of intergovernmental communication, etc. However, from the point of view of the authors, the most interesting aspect of the study is the identification of language system mechanisms used to adapt to conditions of certain non-ecological political practices. On this basis, we can speak about the “intoxication” of consciousness caused by the impact of social environment.

3. Methodology

The methodological concept of the study was based on both humanitarian methods (dynamic and taxonomic analysis, modeling method, explanatory description) and linguistic methods (the method of segmentation of specific verbal phenomena or facts, their categorical and contextual analysis, generalization and characterization of underlying ethno-mental entities). It aims at a multi-aspect research of ecolinguistic issues in discursive practices, dependent on a multidimensional set of components of the socio-communicative field.

¹ This factor is extremely important for the ecolinguistic approach as it shows the consolidation of the “rule-making” act.

The scripts of public speeches made by representatives of Russian political elite became the material for studying legitimate political discursive practices. This choice was due to two factors: on the one hand, foreign and domestic policies of the Russian Federation, given the current geopolitical situation, are of increasing interest to academicians, including linguists; and on the other hand, the speeches of prominent Russian politicians largely form a global political discourse. Thus, the analysis of these speech products, or speeches, facilitates the presentation of an objective picture of the application of common and specific communicative techniques in linguistic and cultural universes. An additional criterion for material selection was the genre and thematic unity of speeches; therefore, special attention was paid to press releases published in official sources, comments and interviews with opposite ideological positions, demonstrating common character of linguistic and semiotic constituents in the political space (over 1000 text units).

According to the authors, the integrity of the proposed model of studying communicative interaction (focused not only on the category of national values, but also on tense aspects of institutional communication, which serve as basis for public consciousness manipulation), the volume and the representative nature of the research material provide credibility to the conclusions of the analysis.

4. Results

Ecolinguistics, being an anthropologically oriented branch of research, takes a special place in the scientific paradigm of modern linguistics. It aims at studying text units in terms of their impact on individuals and society as a whole, characterizes the role of the language as a complex semiotic system in possible violations of ecolinguistic situations and detects ways to eliminate negative consequences. The range and scope of ecolinguistic problems today are extremely wide; however, these problems become particularly visible in the space of political communication, since modeling methods and communication channels, essential for establishing a dialogue in the “power – society” system, are of significant scientific importance. Political discourse as a separate spatiotemporal formation and at the same time a systemic phenomenon that explicates multidimensional linguistic material becomes a means of ordering, evolution and transformation of political reality into an ecolinguistic space, which can serve as a verbal code to identify modern integrated reality and linguocultural experience of the nation.

Verification of the methodological concept of the study enlarged by methods of cognitive projection, linguistic and cultural interpretation and pragmatic consideration of textual units enabled the authors:

- to define and substantiate the principles of ecolinguistic modeling a modern communicative space,
- to qualify and classify identifiers of non-ecological political discursive interaction, to compare their semantic and pragmatic characteristics,
- to detect indicators of social asymmetry in ideologically charged discursive practices,
- to study the processes of language diffusion and recontextualization and methods of speech influence, and
- to single out new linguistic and cultural resources of institutional communication practices and define areas of possible communication risks.

5. Discussion

From the authors' point of view, *political discourse* is speech activity carried out by subjects in the spheres of political institutional communication, determined by a certain social and role hierarchy and objectified in the form of politically oriented text units in their entire genre and functional diversity (Bozhenkova, Bozhenkova, & Bozhenkova, 2017). Being a type of institutional discourse, political discourse comprises a number of constitutive features (consistency, functional completeness, absence of severe structural restrictions, communicative certainty) and fulfills general discourse functions, namely informative, delimitative, argumentative, group-forming and persuasive functions. The agonal function (from Greek *agon* – competition, duel), the function of social identification (differentiation and integration of group policy agents), the function of control (including manipulation of public consciousness) and the function of interpretation (the setup of “language reality” in the politics field) are specific for political discourse (Parshina, 2005). This list also include the functions acknowledged by Graber: the function of “information distribution”, the function of “agenda setting”, and the function of “projection to future and past” (Graber, 1981, p. 198). These characteristics, expanding their action within the framework of political communication, determine the basic feature of political discourse – its use as an instrument of political power, its preservation and redistribution. Thus, the distribution of information on the state of affairs in the political community is one of the most important functions of political discourse with regard to the civil society. This is due to the fact, that its members normally do not come into direct contact with the world of politics, and their experience in this area is not based on their own political engagement, but mainly on the verbal “pictures” offered to them. Status reporting can take diverse forms (as descriptions, comparisons, opinions and conclusions) and actualizes in a wide variety of genres (as

official statements, messages to congress, press conferences, interviews, informal conversations, etc.). Along with evident, explicit information, these messages may include elements with an implicit connotation (emotionally charged keywords expressing basic political orientations and values, patriotic symbols, euphemisms, etc.). Implicit information can also be obtained by “reading between the lines” and generalizations; chronotope characteristics of the verbal act, its relationship with historical, cultural and axiological factors and paralinguistic components are extremely significant. Consequently, political discourse attaches sense to all constituents of the social field: they either constitute the object of communication (its referential aspect), or act as elements of the pragmatic context, including pragmatic presuppositions.

A specific picture of the political world is determined by differential characteristics of the political discourse. These include a peculiar institutional character, semantic uncertainty, the restoration of which is possible due to the inextricable connection between political texts with sociocultural, ideological, historical, psychological components of the communicative situation, in which they have been created, as well as with the system of cognitive and pragmatic attitudes of the addresser interacting with the addressee. This brings up the question about the specifics of the language techniques of political discursive practices and the existence of professionally oriented signs: verbal, nonverbal and “semasiologically hidden” (the authors’ term). According to Demyankov (2001), the “individuality” of the language of politics is due to the following features: a frequent use of peculiar speech techniques; an expansion of precedential texts and statements thesaurus; an original sound or written presentation; an abundance of terms in a political vocabulary; and a particular ideological charge of common verbal units, as compared to regular language. A significant number of scholars, however, deny the uniqueness of political discourse, emphasizing that unique linguistic features of political discourse are not always subject to identification and typically “do not go beyond the relevant idioethnic languages” (Parshin, 2001, p. 193).

Exterior “ordinariness” of political communication, from the authors’ point of view, is due to the fact, that politics is the only professional sphere in which communication targets mass addressee. Thus, media become both an environment and a means of its existence, thereby political language is deprived of corporate properties inherent to any professional language (Sheigal, 2001, p. 30). This way, media transmit ideas of public authorities and interests of social institutions, they express opinions and views on behalf various social, professional, age and other groups, and at the same time mass media often act not only as a agents that cover issues in modern politics, but also as subjects of political activity. Moreover, some editions and media channels have gained sufficient recognition to claim their right to

an independent position on topical social issues, which allows us to regard them as political institutions and mass consciousness and public opinion influencers. Accordingly, modern political discourse is becoming more diverse, it includes new group of speakers, uses a wider range of discursive practices that enable maintenance, actualization, transmission and popularization of political activities, especially those that have not previously received legitimate expression and have not provided us with an opportunity to observe the diversity of communicative interaction in the political sphere.

At the same time, the agonal character of political discourse, which is its main feature, remains a semiotic constant (along with the functions of orientation and interpretation) and constitutes a property, which separates political discourse from similar communicative phenomena. Moreover, an explicit competition in interpersonal/institutional/cross-cultural political interaction and the immutability of this quality of the political discourse determines its ecolinguistic specificity. Political discourse implies a certain conflict potential as a result of collision of interacting entities expressed by means of language; contributes to the emergence of disintegrative communicative strategies and tactics and verbal/non-verbal signs with an invective capacity; involves a lower communicative case, etc. However, a conflict of interests in politics, unlike many other spheres of human interaction, is deliberate, so both parties perceive it equally. This is why political conflicts do not exclude cooperation between its participants, which determines the intensity of political communication and defines its format: a discussion, a debate, a duel, a conflict, an information/psychological war, etc. The majority of agonal tactics in political discourse constitute its communicative norm and belong to political interaction, whereas extreme forms of communication in the sphere of politics are regarded as a mindset for confrontation and destruction of the previously achieved unity, agreement and cooperation and suggest, from the authors' point of view, a forced introduction of ecolinguistic control.

New tools and technologies give rise to new genres and methods of information transmission. This phenomenon leads to the emergence of new mono- and polysemiotic communication systems that adjust political communication, expanding its thematic boundaries, changing its discursive parameters and methods of linguistic explication (see forums, social networks, political blogs, etc.). A display text as a form of network media possesses special differential features: a polycode/multimedia character, non-linearity (a complex network, absence of beginning and end), interactivity (direct communication with the addressee of the text and a reverse impact on the text structure). These features directly affect the macrostructure of political discourse and its language components. Thus, 1) the volume of discourse is increasing at a rate that impedes an adequate comprehension

of information; 2) the language of politics is gaining ambiguity and its units are becoming disorderly; 3) the meanings of many words (and even terms!) are being diminished to the condition of an empty “shell” (the so-called “amoeba”-words, term used by Kara-Murza (2005)), which can be re-filled with any other, and often an opposite sense. As a result, the adequacy of text perception is significantly reduced, which causes ecolinguistic issues, while toxic communication practices, supported by the global network, have a significant impact on the cognitive and psychological capacity of an individual and the target audience as a whole.

The modification of the functional charge of political discursive practices is probably the most interesting (and the most complicated) aspect of ecolinguistics. The three main parameters (information, manipulation and control¹) are complemented by the fourth parameter – audience entertainment, which was formerly (since the appearance of printed and audiovisual media) typical of mass media. Thereby, the importance verbal and non-verbal means releasing the “tension” in the context increases at the stage of dialogical communication establishment in a legitimate or illegitimate political environment. A certain institutionality often determines the impossibility to explicitly mark fundamental premises, which results in the inclusion of a large range of precedential situations and peculiar language techniques in political text and speeches. Consequently, it enables the authors to outline the most important features of political discourse: an extensive use of metaphors; euphemistic nature; ideological content (with apparent “good and bad”, “friend or foe” dichotomies); the presence of emotional propagandistic slogans; irrationality, based on rituals, traditions and polysemic denotations; the proclamation of “the ultimate truth”. Thus, political discourse as a form of social communication identifies the culture of a society with its ideological attitudes, axiological symbols and other mental signs. Moreover, the language of politics is integrating social interaction among civil masses, so the elements of political discourse can be observed in the “culture of everyday” as well as in speech acts seeking to involve audience in the illegitimate activities and illegal communities (Araeva, Katyshev, Osadchiy, & Olenov, 2018).

Legitimate political discursive practices, being the main stage for expression of ideological postulates by certain social elites and at the same time a platform for the formation of public opinion on various issues, have numerous ways of explication, serving the mission to preserve and reproduce the social institution of power. In political sciences, legitimacy is as a qualitative characteristic of power relations associated with maintaining public conviction that existing political institutions and relations correspond or should correspond to society values and

¹ All the previously listed functions are within this triad.

normative evolution of political communications and public sphere (Zavershinsky, 2016, p. 8). Nonetheless, the study of power communications is inevitably reduced to the analysis of symbolic structures in the cultural environment of a certain political power as well as forms, methods, strategies and tactics of political communication. Therefore, linguistic research registers current trends in the implementation of political communication; identifies typical speech features in the interaction between power institutions and the society; determines its objectivity and its existence prospects given the development of modern society; and thus ensures a successful legitimization of political decisions.

In this regard, it seems logical that discursive acts, in which at least one of three components – the subject, the addressee or the speech product content – belongs to the sphere of politics, should be attributed to legitimate political practices (Sheigal, 2001). Under this approach, primary genres (program documents, official speeches, election debates, etc.) come to the forefront, placing secondary, or convergent, genres that combine elements of political other types of discourse (analytical articles, commentaries on political speeches, political statements, letters to the editor, cartoons, parodies, etc.) in the background. However, a more detailed analysis of constitutive features of this type of discourse reveals that the three components mentioned above are insufficient since the subject and the addressee, despite being political figures, can also be engaged in a purely domestic dialogue. Accordingly, it is necessary to add two important elements – the objective and the perlocutionary effect – to the three parameters named previously, as these components allow the qualification of a communication act as a legitimate political practice. In addition, it is impossible to talk about an interactional communication model without taking an objective and a perlocutionary effect of the speech act into account.

In legitimate political practices, goal-setting and perlocutionary effect should ideally coincide since the achievement, the “semiotic anchoring”, the transmission of value and pragmatic experience (the goal) and the deliberate re-transmission of certain axiological dominants by the audience (the perlocutionary effect) together secure normative public relations and a social coercion, which are the most important components of the “power – society” antinomy. At the same time, the ratio dichotomy of these categories deserves particular attention. On the one hand, political discourse produces and explicates the standards of status/role behavior, consolidates binary relations of normality/abnormality, positive/negative features, acceptable/unacceptable features, the good/evil, etc., expressed in moral imperatives, traditions, rituals, codes of conduct, legal acts, etc. On the other hand, the social institute of politics produces and transmits new discourses (in the form of ideas, principles, images and other symbolic figures) that provide a framework and focal

points of reality comprehension and interpretation. (Ruzakova, & Ruzakov, 2008, p. 194).

In that perspective, the dictionary of political reality providing descriptions of socially significant meanings (codes), symbols, concepts and ways of their representation is of special relevance. Modern political life is profusely marked by negatively charged concepts that comprise a significant part of everyday information: *sanctions, cyberattacks, corruption, exposure, provocation, contract termination, schismatic church, threats, isolation of Russia, attack on Russia, "death" of Skripal, spire, Nazi slogans, terrorist attacks, interference with elections, conspiracy, impeachment*, etc. In media texts, designed to form mass consciousness, words and expressions that denote negative phenomena of our time become dominant: *murder, shooting, robbery, violence, explosion, fire, plane crash, flood, natural disaster, epidemic, impoverishment, bankruptcy, terrorism*, etc. As a result, text units shaping a communicative and ideological environment of modern people obtain a distinct invective coloring.

The analysis of the frequency with which Russian verbal units are used in modern texts demonstrates that a considerable amount of lexemes, denoting essential concepts of Russian culture and humanistic ideas, have been shifted to the periphery of Russian lexicon: *compassion, pity, mercy, participation, sympathy, mutual understanding, conscience, justice, joy, honor, shame, modesty, kindness, virtue*. Its former greatness and sublimity are fading, and so does the content of the words *homeland, patriotism, hero, pride, human dignity, achievement, feat*. They are familiar to native speakers, but the range of their functioning is getting limited, their use is becoming automatic, and "their content is getting formalistic, turning these words into clichés subject to enantiosemy" (Ionova, & Shakhovskiy, 2012, p. 139). According to sociolinguistic studies, the curve demonstrating the use of the keyword *Homeland/homeland* in Russian political discourse, which reached its peak in the 30s - early 60s (the construction of socialism, the Great Patriotic war, the conquest of space), is on the decline since mid-60s, with a slight increase only in 2014. In this regard, the speech of radio presenter Larina (2014) is highly illustrative:

I am so sick of the word "patriotism" I might vomit worms and cherry stones. ... Patriotism is destructive. It creates nothing but chatter, lies, charlatanism, hypocrisy. Patriotism is not compatible with freedom; it kills freedom of thought, freedom of creativity, and freedom of self-realization. Patriotism in itself is the religion of yesterday, the religion of the dead (Larina, 2014, Echo of Moscow blog, February 3rd)

The word *patriotism* is often filled with the opposite content: *old ideology, pseudo-patriotism, the last mayhem of villains, our slogan, the same as extremism*, etc.

A word always depicts speaker's image of the world, thus, a rapid reduction of vocabulary and change in the semasiological field of political concepts indicate a significant narrowing of the vision and the reality comprehension by native speakers. Notwithstanding, it is worth to mention that today there is a gradual return of traditional semantics of this word in the political discourse:

There are various components in the feeling of patriotism, we cannot list them all. Therefore, we will single out only its main vectors. It is love for your country. It is respect, and under certain circumstances, it is love for your state. It is love for your people. Here we understand love not just as "a delight of the senses," but as a desire and willingness to bring a particular benefit to the object of our love. We do not have and cannot have any other unifying idea than patriotism. (speech by V. Putin, <https://www.putin-today.ru/archives/20531>).

Communicative activation of such concepts as *homeland, patriotism, national idea, heroism, salvation, protection, unification* not only testifies to the appearance of a new phenomenon in legitimate discursive practices – an "aestheticization of politics", but also demonstrates the value-oriented component of these concepts. This determines their place in official political information: "Homeland is a model of a beautiful and a much beloved community in contrast to civil society which is transparent and rational" (Sandomirskaya, 2001, p. 3).

Another attribute of legitimate political practices is the emergence of new ways to reduce positive public consciousness. They encompass: 1) the inclusion of language units of an international character and characterized by "blurred universality", or minimum/zero content (*progress, public opinion, a path towards consolidation, true justice*, etc.); 2) the formation of oxymoron composites (*the fiend of good, the horror of delight, love-hate, killer love, the achievement of failure*, etc.) introducing a positive component in a negative idea (Ionova, & Shakhovsky, 2012, p. 141); 3) a specific euphemization that turns into dysphemias (*to impose constitutional order, polite people, the introduction of democratic principles, our Western partners*, etc.), when reaching the addressee. The combination of these verbal signs receiving a metaphorical refraction in social and communicative reality, as a rule, creates sustainable connotative negatives and constructs an "information hierarchy", which transmits proposed topics, problems and opinions "from above" and forms public opinion in a single-way communication. Thus, it is no wonder that

many researchers¹ have dubbed current events in the media political field “*the war of wordings*”. Accordingly, the term used to denote an active part of the population – *civil society, protest electorate* or *the source of the ruling regime* – determines the development of public policy. In this regard, the role of phraseological journalistic clichés, evaluative nominations, and precedential phenomena involved in the field of interpretation and making up the “knowledge of the world”, common for the speaker and the addressee, significantly increases. For example, in a news story about the Russian-Georgian spy scandal (broadcast by Echo of Moscow radio station, Echo news program, November 5th, 2010) reported by an on-site correspondent, nominations such as *spies* and *conspiracy* from the first lines form a correlating evaluation field. Furthermore, the thematic expression *spy scandal* introduces the frame “*recruitment – integration – encryption – secret information – liaison – secret operation – disclosure – exposure – evidence – public disclosure*, implemented by subsequent messages of the block. The *evidence* are associated with a *documentary movie*, however, the lexemes *spy* and *movie* activate ideas about a *spy movie* in the consciousness of the addressee, inducing him or her to consider the reference episode as part of a certain scenario and question its credibility (Saakyan, & Severskaya, 2017). In a comment by A. Orekh on another story in the program a story on political prospects of the “Yabloko” (“Apple”) party in the case of its coalition *with a rating Pear*, the expansion of the reference meaning is due to metaphorical nominations and precedential texts: “*It will no longer be an “Apple”, but Apple Jam at best, but it is still better to turn into jam than into apple peel*”. In gastronomy, a distinctive property of *jam* is its uniformity, lack of a pronounced structure; in jazz and music improvisation, it is the spontaneity (professional musicians perform without rehearsals and primarily for their own pleasure, which is common on the political stage). *Peel* stands for the *waste* of political process, while the *apple* and the *pear* do not only represent two types of political *figures*, but also denote certain mental signs. If you remember the beginning of the famous song “Katyusha” (*Apple and pear trees were in bloom, and the mist was floating upon the river...*), it implicated multiple concepts in this context: the metaphors of war, uncertain future and hope. In an interview with I. Khakamada (broadcast on Liberty radio station, September 28th, 2009) the focus of contrast is explicated in a *matrix* that combines the designation of software and hardware for simulating the virtual world and the system of interconnections in a certain state of reality. For instance, “*real life is in deep trouble*”; “*political PR hits rock bottom in the invention of new words, messages, technologies*”; “*we begin to live in a matrix*”; “*in this global or Russian matrix Medvedev is trying to occupy a competitive position with Putin*”; “*this wave has also reached the province*”; “*I think this micromatrix will soon spill out everywhere*”;

¹ See works of Solganik, G.Y; Voinova Y. A.

“*the matrix gradually through mass media absorbs a person’s worldview*”; etc. Constant “predicates” of legitimate political practices charging their variable “subjects” metaphorically transmit ideological constants and stereotypes consciously/unconsciously set in the society and in the mental field of the ethnic group.

It is noticeable that the rhetoric of Russian political discourse in recent times aims at “reformatting” subjectivity, ideology and history as a whole. On the one hand, new symbolic attributes are being created and old ones are being updated (cf. *Crimea is ours!* vs. *Party of crooks and thieves!*), and the range of precedential texts and names of historical figures (*St. George’s ribbon, Alexander III*) is expanding. On the other hand, numerous linguistic and semiotic constituents (slogans, emblems, awards) are being discredited and even abolished because of a considerable number of editorial, cinematic and other texts with unilateral negative characteristics of these symbols. At the same time, we note that “the symbol never belongs to any single synchronous cross-section of culture; it always pierces this cross-section vertically, coming from the past and moving into the future” (Lotman, 2010, p. 185). Respectively, its removal from the consciousness of the society modifies dominant meanings produced and consolidated in the language space and generates a new image of the world.

The third attribute of legitimate political practices is its inherent manipulative orientation. Undoubtedly, in political discussion people tend to avoid answering tough questions, to conceal undesirable facts, and at the same time, to influence the interlocutor, to impose their opinion on the interlocutor, and even to offend the interlocutor. However, the language itself, as noted by T.M. Nikolaeva, “has a sufficient set of interactive, composite, syntactic, grammatical tools for these purposes. In other words, language has a property of self-manipulation” (Nikolaeva, 1990, p. 225). This property allows speakers to interpret the reality in various ways. One of the most effective mechanisms of manipulation in Russian is nominalization, i.e. the replacement of nouns by adjectives or verbs (cf. *the police brutally cracked down on demonstrators* is replaced by the phrase *a crackdown on demonstrators; to act cowardly – a coward*). Another effective method is the so-called “language demagogy” (the term was introduced by T.V. Bulygina and A.D. Shmelev) – a technique of indirect impact on the recipient, when ideas are not expressed directly, but they are introduced discreetly with the help of tools provided by language mechanisms. The essence of this technique is a disguise of subjective assertions as judgment perceived as common knowledge (presupposition); it is usually labeled by constructions such as “*As you all know*”, “*It is a well-known fact*,” “*It is a common knowledge*”, etc. The third technique is *perseverance* – a tactic of multiple persistent repetition (an integral part of diverse suggestive and theatrical discourses), which

affects both linguistic consciousness and subconscious of the addressee of information messages.

The fourth attribute of legitimate political practices actualizing ecolinguistic problems is a certain institutional reversion (Ionova, & Shakhovsky, 2014). Despite the expansion of opportunities for public participation in social interaction, communicative interaction between the society and the government is commonly built “from above down”. This promotes the elaboration of special speech clichés and consolidation of special language signs. The majority of political subjects perceive them as obligatory prescriptions; however, civil society's loyal attitude often levels the imperative nature of the manifestation of will. Moreover, authoritative communication is often justified, since it defines positive values, norms and behavior patterns – *tolerance, legitimacy, efficiency, victory*, etc. Presupposition field actualizing ideological slogans (“*No backing down!*”, “*No black wings will fly over the Motherland!*”) and constructions fostering safe labor conditions (“*Do not touch*”, “*Turn off before work*”, “*No trespassing*”) naturally transform verbal prohibition formulas into patterns of discursive political practices: *require, must, meet requirements, on demand, impossible, forbidden, not accepted, not authorized, guilty*, etc. Minor inclusions of language units denoting the actual appointment of public authorities – to perform the role of institutional “public servants” (*to create conditions, to facilitate, to provide aid, to report, dear, if you would be so kind, please, let me, thank you*, etc.), is treated as a special personal attribute conditioned by upbringing or education. These units, from the authors’ point of view, are indicators of a developed authoritative dominant in the language and factors of the effective implementation of the impact function, which sometimes violates ecolinguistic space of political actors.

Both a cause and a consequence of institutional reversion is a shift in social roles and the substitution of the concepts “rights” and “duties” in application to different participants of interaction: people are endowed duties, while the authorities are endowed with rights. This is why we observe the replacement of the “power” seme by the “domination” seme – *omnipotence, domination, rule, dictatorship, hegemony, master, crown, throne*, etc., whereas in the linguistic consciousness of institutional “grassroots” the assessment of authorities’ actions is expressed the following way – *dominance, rulers, pantocracy, those in power, power brokers*, etc. We should underline that the problem of “nomination and power” vs “the power of nomination” does not demonstrate the capabilities of language system, but primarily determines the proposition of the construction and the vector of further incorporation of the sign into other discursive fields. This is why Confucius instructed governors to start the board by correcting nominations – in order to comprehend the essence of things.

Today, the expansion of institutional reversion in the political space (where social institutions come in direct contact with those individuals for whom they were created) is aggravated by the accentuation of the negative/reduction of the positive field of communicants' linguocultural consciousness and the simultaneous expansion of statements' reference meaning (by metaphorization, euphemization, nominalization, various manipulation tactics, including the substitution of symbolic constructs). This leads to the formation of a new reality, the mechanisms of which are able not only to limit the legitimacy of political decisions, but also to shape other contextual concepts, verbal behavior norms, assessment stereotypes and communicative traditions of the universe as a whole. As a result, the composition and the structure of legitimate political practices becomes closer to illegitimate and even illegal ones.

6. Conclusion

A word is a phenomenon subject to constant development and incessant research, since a language, as a basic attribute of a person, distinguishing him in the ecosystem, is a key marker of the relationship between the object and the environment and, accordingly, "must preserve all signs of humanity" (Bernatskaya, 2014, p. 28). However, a centuries-old history of verbal signs demonstrates the expansion of the semantic capacity of the word and the formation of new semasiological fields in discourse as a global communicative event. This is due to the fact, that diverse discursive practices are in a state of interdependence and reciprocal complementarity and exert mutual influence and interpenetration determined by mental, behavioral, ethno-cultural components of social relations. In this regard, political discourse, the main goal of which is to conquer, exercise and preserve power, turns out to be especially sensitive to various kinds of transformations, which contribute to the "toxicity" of the political space and thus cause damage to linguoecological system.

The reasons for this phenomenon have both intralinguistic origins (the expansion of the boundaries of normative language due to the growing sophistication of verbal communication formats; the quantitative and qualitative complication of speech communication spheres since the Internet determines the creation of new discourse types; liberalization of journalistic style due to the wide "migration" of language constituents and a certain tribute to the speech fashion) and extralinguistic origins (globalization and integration of linguistic and cultural components of different ethnic groups which results not only in positive, but also in an impressive number of negative consequences, from a lowering level of individual verbal sophistication level to the activation of illegitimate communicative practices). The main factor, however, is the unrestricted power political actors have over psychological and even mental state of a particular person, carried out through a

competent leveraging of various (and often illegitimate) communication techniques. The values derived from semantic-semiotic associations and generated due to the usage of certain strategies, tactics, verbalized and “semasiologically hidden” ways to express/conceal participants’ intentions, gradually develop and enter adjacent discursive fields. There they establish new semantic connections and form a complex text/discursive unit with a multi-level semantic charge and the highest expressive and emotional potential. Thus, the political logosphere as a part of ecolinguistic system is not only a product of society’s activity, but also its modifier. It penetrates all levels of the human logosphere and actively forms the norms of speech interactions for all subjects included in it, determines their socio-hierarchical structure and the linguoethnic universe as a whole.

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