

Populist Rhetoric in Political Interviews

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Abstract. The article attempts to study a political interview as part of political and ideological media content. The purpose of a political discussion is to explain and promote a specific political ideology. The politician also aims to shape the image of the party he/she represents. The interviewer is a journalist whose task is to monitor the changing roles of communicants. In such an interview, a politician tries to win the initiative. The interviewer strives to ensure that the addressee perceives the discourse of the interviewed politician. The politicians expect that they will be allowed to substantiate their position. The ultimate goal of political interviews is to reach an understanding with the audience on critical issues related to domestic and foreign policy issues. Among the main types of political communication, let us single out political communication, which is carried out by journalists and with the help of journalists. Such communication is also designed for a mass audience. Examples include interviews and analytical articles in the press written by journalists, political scientists or politicians (often with the help of media specialists). In this case, journalists draw the audience's attention to the current issue, suggest ways to solve it, report on the attitude of political organisations and their leaders to it, and help politicians achieve their goals. In this case, journalists draw the audience's attention to the existing problem, propose ways to solve it, report on the attitude of political organisations and their leaders to it, and help politicians achieve their goals. Politically passive citizens perceive political information mainly in the form presented in the media.

Keywords: populism; political discourse; rhetoric; media; political interview.

INTRODUCTION

Political speech has been the subject of interdisciplinary research. Many domestic and foreign experts concur that because speech is a show of solidarity with other speakers of the same language, it is inherently "politically loaded." The desire to comprehend political discourse has given rise to a new field called political linguistics. In the linguistic literature, the political discourse is interpreted broadly and specifically. According to experts who use a broad definition, political discourse is any speech with a political theme, audience, or topic matter. A set of discursive strategies for identifying participants in political debate or framing a specific political communication topic.

A narrow definition of political discourse adheres in particular to Van Dijk, who believes that "political discourse is a class of genres, a limited social sphere, namely politics" [30, p. 134]. Parliamentary debates, party programs, government delib-

erations, and politicians' speeches belong to the sphere of politics.

A political interview is the most common event genre in all forms of political discourse. It is a crucial component of political speech since obtaining and maintaining power is political communication's fundamental problem and goal. This paper aims to demonstrate the function of populist discourse in political interviews. Since political discussions are one of the most common genres of political communication, they have a unique relevance.

The communicative function of the political interview genre is to persuade and convince the audience. In all interviews, the interviewer is the spokesman for the people who ask questions. The interviewer represents public opinion. But the respondent's role, in turn, is expressing their opinion and defending their points of view [23].

There are some specifics of the political interview as a speech genre. Political discussions are

highly conventional (socially “conventional”), public speech genre with a challenging distribution dividing the speech roles of direct participants, in which the journalist reveals or seeks to disclose publicly significant traits of a politician, including “dangerous” ones. In contrast, the latter, answering the journalist’s questions, seeks to convince society of its “demand”.

The cultural situation of the political interview

The cultural situation of the political interview includes some aspects of it. There are the following of them:

1) an action scene, including a) setting: time, place; b) conditions: physical context, social context;

2) a cultural episode, including a) action event/event reflecting participants and their actions: group “We”, group “They”; b) consequences: positive, negative.

The peculiarity of political interview results from the combination of signs in its characteristics inherent in both political discourse and media discourse, as well as features inherent in a dialogue text.

METHODOLOGY

For this research, we used transcripts of interviews given by prominent US politicians and political figures from the Democratic and Republican parties – Hilary Clinton, Barack Obama, Jeb Bush, and Mitt Romney.

1. Full transcript of the interview with Hillary Clinton. The interviewer – Maria Elena Salinas, 12.08.2015.

2. Full transcript of BBC interview with President Barack Obama. The interviewer – “North America”, editor Jon Sopol, 22.07.2015

3. Full transcript of the interview with Mitt Romney, interviewer – Ashley Parkerjan (New York Times), 01.18.2014.

4. Full transcript of interviews with Jeb Bush (an exclusive interview conducted on the former Florida governor's campaign bus in New Hampshire for “Politico”. The interviewer is Glenn Thrush, 02.08.2016

5. Full transcript of the interview with Hillary Clinton. Interviewer – “Nightline”, anchor Cynthia McFadden, 29.01.2013.

6. Full transcript of the interview with Hillary Clinton. Interviewer – Brianna Keilar, 12.07.2015.

In this study, we used conversational analysis with the elements of critical discourse analysis [8]. We studied political interviews from a communication and interaction point of view, considering the social context in which political discussions occur.

The samples of political interviews were studied and analysed thoroughly. The content of the political discussions may vary widely, depending on the intended audience and occasion. Some discourse markers (DMs) that we studied in these interviews are:

- personal pronoun: *I*

- verbs of mental activities: *I think, I believe, I know, I hope;*

- words of indefinite semantics: *some, other, places, people;*

- negative particle: *not.*

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Some features of the political interviews. There are some features of the political interview: persuasiveness, particular targeting, two-subject character (the authors of the text are both interlocutors), the vector of addressing (from the interviewer to the interlocutor and from the interlocutor to the interviewer, on the one hand, and from them both to a potential reader - on the other), informativeness, spontaneity, authorship.

Thus, the political interview is a particular genre of political discourse with a wide variety. Research interviews cannot be limited to general principles since every interview has its cultural situation. In the present time, due to the popularity of this genre, its boundaries are expanding, and discussions are transferring from specific political communications into the general environment of political discourse.

Mitigation Strategy. A political interview, being a communicative interaction process, aims to achieve a particular result in the interaction. To achieve the necessary goals, communicators use specific communication strategies and tactics. For successful communication, the addressee must be guided by principles of communicative cooperation, firstly, a politeness that forms the basis of cooperative communication.

In this context, the phenomenon of mitigation is significant – communicative comfort.

The term mitigation was introduced in 1980 by Fraser [14]. Mitigation has become a language phenomenon. As for the “mitigation process”, defined as practical, cognitive, and linguistic behaviour, its primary goal is to reduce vulnerability [24] and is synonymous with courtesy [6].

Mitigation is a communicative category, the main content of which are prescriptions, attitudes, and rules determined by the maxims of politeness and aimed at minimising communication risks in interaction, implemented in communication by mitigating strategies and tactics marked by ethnocultural specifics.

In a political interview, a politician very often expresses value judgments about his/her actions or actions of opponents, as well as about various events that become the subject of discussion. It is evident that the politician is interested in self-presentation and creating a positive image. In this regard, mitigation, or communicative mitigation, acquires special significance. The mitigation strategy of mitigation assessment is the most frequent in political interviews. This strategy is implemented using the following tactics:

The tactic of underlining the opinion subjectivity. By making a specific statement, the politician emphasises that it reflects his/her personal opinion that he/she does not claim to be accurate but only expresses his/hers own point of view. To clearly illustrate the use of this tactic, we can study the following examples. For instance, here is the part of the interview with the American politician Hillary Clinton, the interviewer – Maria Elena Salinas, 12.08.2015, and the amount of the BC interview with the American politician, attorney and former President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, the interviewer – “North America”, editor Jon Sopel, 22.07.2015; Mitt Romney, interviewed by Ashley Parkerjan (New York Times), 01.18.2014:

“Salinas: What's your biggest challenge in these next few months?”

“Clinton: I think the biggest challenge is earning every vote I can.

<...> You know, I really believe elections should not be about personalities, although I know that's where they often end up. I think you should have to present an agenda to the country <...>. And I hope

that that will earn the support of a majority of Democrats and then of Americans” [29].

“Sopel: And you're going to talk about entrepreneurship at this summit in Nairobi. Is there any link between security and entrepreneurship?”

“Obama: I think there is. I believe that when people see opportunity, <...> then they're less vulnerable to the propaganda and twisted ideologies that have been attracting young people particularly now being turbocharged through social media” [2].

“I think people see him as a real straight shooter, who pulls no punches and tells it like it is, and I think the American people like that” (Mitt Romney)

“... with candidates who I think have the best prospects of getting the country on the right track.” (Mitt Romney)” [26].

In these cases, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, with the help of the personal pronoun “I” and mental activity verbs, highlight their opinion's subjectivity. The first-person singular pronoun highlights the authorship of the speaker. Verbs of mental activities used in these examples (*think, believe, know, hope*) contain a subjective-value component in their semantic structure.

The tactic of indefinite reference. These tactics imply the use of nominations, which are not included in the knowledge fund of the interlocutors. Let's study the following examples - the part of the interview with the American politician Jeb Bush, an exclusive interview conducted on the former Florida governor's campaign bus in New Hampshire for “Politico”, the interviewer – Glenn Thrush, 02.08.2016, and the part of the interview with Hillary Clinton, interviewer – “Nightline” anchor Cynthia McFadden, 29.01.2013:

“Thrush: Can you talk a little bit about that? I mean, is that kind of what you're seeing? Do you agree with that?”

“Bush: Angst and anxiousness—about the future, that it's not working. Some people are angry because they think it's working for some at their expense” [27].

“McFadden: The administration has been criticised by some as having what has been referred to as an 'ad hoc' foreign policy, a sort of whack a mole foreign policy. What is the Obama doctrine as you understand it as regards to foreign policy?”

“Clinton: Look for every way you can to bring together coalitions so that yes, America will and must lead, it is the indispensable nation, but other countries have to step up and start taking responsibility, and they are starting to do that. We saw that certainly in Libya, we’re seeing it in other places, in Africa and beyond” [1].

In these examples, words of indefinite semantics, such as *some, other, places, and people*, serve as examples of the essential mitigation methods. They decrease the certainty of expression, which allows us to avoid mentioning the object of assessment directly. In the second example, the journalist needs to identify who exactly criticises the administration, using the indefinite pronoun *some*. Hillary Clinton also doesn't critically assess the particular, supposedly inactive countries from which she awaits determined actions.

The tactic of using litotes as a mitigation. This tactic's purpose is to depreciate the damaging degree of the object being assessed. That allows for escaping conflict situations and saving the communication participants face. Here is a part of the interview with the American politician Jeb Bush, an exclusive interview conducted on the former Florida governor's campaign bus in New Hampshire, for “Politico”, the interviewer – Glenn Thrush, 02.08.2016:

“Thrush: But isn't it possible that your party right now is in such a state of transition that it might not be capable of making the appropriate decision”?

“Bush: Well, if it's in transition, it's in transition to something, and my intention is for it to be in transition to something that allows people to rise up again. That's my mission. <...> That's what I'm fighting for, and I don't really – you know, all this stuff that swirls around it is not really relevant to me” [27].

As one can see from the examples mentioned above, this tactic is implemented with the help of the negative particle “not”. The strategy of undefined reference is used as well – *transition to something*.

The tactic of euphemistic substitutions and the use of politically correct language. Here you can see the part of the interview with the American politician Hillary Clinton, the interviewer – Maria Elena Salinas; the interview took part on 12.08.2015:

“Salinas: Do you think that this [your new education program] would be approved by a Republican led Congress?”

“Clinton: I do, because I think what I would do is to have rich people pay more to make sure that hard-working young people can go to college. <...> And that would be particularly important for Hispanic students because Hispanic students are now going to college at a much higher rate. But they still face a lot of financial burdens” [29].

Politicians today use more politically correct language and various euphemisms to avoid conflict situations and mitigate negative assessment. In the example given above, Hillary Clinton, under the phrase *hard-working young people* means people from low-income families. Politicians try to focus their attention on this population segment's diligence and hard work, thus mitigating the negative aspect of their lives – poverty. Hillary Clinton also uses the word, *Hispanic students*, trying to be politically correct as much as possible. It demonstrates the willingness of the politician to show her goodwill towards all American people, regardless of their background. Furthermore, this statement is mitigated by underlining opinion subjectivity (*I think*).

The tactic of avoiding the question. In the interview process, some situations may occur when the question of the journalist is uncomfortable for the politician when the politician is not ready to answer or doesn't consider it necessary. In this case, he/she uses the tactic of avoiding the question. Let's study the part of the interview with Hillary Clinton, interviewer – Brianna Keilar, 12.07.2015:

“Keilar: Senator Sanders has talked about how, if he's president, he would raise taxes. In fact, he said to CNN's Jake Tapper, he would raise them substantially higher than they are today, on big corporations, on wealthy Americans. Would you?”

“Clinton: I will be laying out my own economic policies. Again, everybody has to run his or her own campaign. And I'm going to be telling the American 139 people what propose and how I think it will work and then we'll let voters make up their minds”[10].

As we can see from this example, the politician avoids an uncomfortable question to maintain a friendly relationship with the journalist and save her face. In this case, the tactic of avoiding the question is combined with the tactic of underlining opinion subjectivity (*I think*).

Avoiding the question is rare in the political discourse interview because it is characterised by a low degree of interaction and leads to the distancing of the interlocutors. This threatens the whole process of the interview progress.

The conducted research on political interviews leads to the conclusion that the most widespread tactic among mitigation strategies is the tactic of opinion subjectivity. This tactic is shown in 50% of the analysed fragments.

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of political interviews. Our findings indicate that political interviews are one of the most important genres of political discourse. Also, we aimed to demonstrate tactics to lower negative features in the context of American culture. Thus, our analysis has brought forward the following results: the context of the political interviews that have been studied in this research tells us about the inexhaustible optimism of the American people, and mitigation strategies in them are aimed at the mitigation of the negative sides of the statements, reflect one of the most significant American – the respect of the opponent's opinion as an individual.

CONCLUSIONS

The role of populist rhetoric in a political interview is very significant. The vital interest of linguistics in the studies of discourse, pragmatics and rhetoric has resulted in the growing popularity of research of certain genre forms. Our findings highlight that the choice of strategy and tactic in a political interview is closely connected with the ethnic and cultural specifics of the behaviour of the interview participants. The results strongly imply that national values must reflect themselves in the language as the essential and crucial components of the culture. Fragments of the interviews with American politicians analysed in this paper with extraordinary evidence demonstrate the impact of the sociocultural factor on the choice of strategies and tactics. The mitigation strategy of the mitigation assessment is consonant with the central values of American society. Thus, the tactic of underlining opinion subjectivity through populist rhetoric reflects individualism and self-reliance, which are inherent to the American people.

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