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The Threat and Fear of War: The State and Politics in American Mass Media

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Abstract

The cultivation of political fears of the state and radical change of attitudes in the minds of people is possible in certain socio-political and economic conditions and massive propaganda in the mass media. The concept of political fear is insufficiently studied in psycholinguistics. This article is dedicated to exploring the political fears of the state in the modern American mass media. This research uses hypothetical-deductive and inductive methods, methods of definitional, interpretative and subjective analysis, and content analysis. It is found that in the modern American mass media, political fear of the state is revealed in fear of war and competition. To verbalize the horror of war and struggle, politicians in power use various tactics of agonal function as the main means of impact on opponents.

Keywords: International politics, media discourse, state tactics, fear, war, American media, psycholinguistics

Introduction

The role of the mass media has significantly increased in everyone's life. They have become the most robust instrument of impact on everyone's consciousness. Print mass media is a necessary means of impact on our decisions. And the most common method of manipulation in all mass media is the sense of fear, which is proper to both ordinary people and politicians. Political communication is not restricted to traditional media alone. Instead, it has spread to social media. However, it has its deliberation process, and the gender aspect cannot be ruled out (Jain, Sodha, & Jain, 2018).

Moreover, the political discussions in social media are often influenced by hyperactive users (Papakyriakopoulos, Serrano, & Hegelich, 2020). Besides, the concept of political fear remains insufficiently studied in modern political psycholinguistics. The object of the research is political fear. The subject of the research is the means of expressing the political fear of the state in the modern American mass media.

The main goal of the research is to identify the particularities of verbalization of political fear of the state in the modern American mass media. To achieve this aim, the

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following tasks should be carried out: identify the main types of political fear as well as to identify the features of the verbal implementation of that fear (the fear of war, terrorism, and competition). The scientific novelty of the research is to determine the “political fears” concept in the system of media discourse, to establish the types of this concept as well as to identify the primary means of verbalizing the political fear of the state in the American media.

The methods applied in research work include hypothetical-deductive and inductive methods, methods of definitional, interpretative and subjective analysis, and content analysis. The socio-pragmatic approach was used as the basis of this research. It implies studying the human interactive speech activity, taking into account linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic categories as well as conventional and institutional particularities of the socio-cultural political context.

The material of this research was the texts of the American periodicals and Internet websites for the beginning of the 21st century. The theoretical basis of the study was linguistic, psychological, sociological, political science research works of the following domestic and foreign scientists: Boeva-Îmelechko et al., (2018), Butenko and Mironov (1998), Deriabin (2014), James (2011), S. Huntington (1998), Iliin (2001), Clausewitz (2008), Maltus (1993), Minakova, Ponomarenko & Talybina (2018), Osipov (2015), Repina et al., (2018), Shiryayeva, Gelyayeva, Alikaev, Huchinaeva and Toguzaeva (2018), Shiryayeva Avsharov (2018), Zelenskaya et al., (2018), Zheltukhina (2003; 2007), Zheltukhina, Busygina, Merkulova, Zyubina and Buzinova (2018), and Zheltukhina and Omelchenko (2008a; 2008b; 2010).

Thematic classifications of fears are based on determining the object or subject of fear and the sphere of its implementation: social, political, economic, domestic, business, pedagogical, and the other fears (Zelenskaya et al., 2018). Since political media fears (Zheltukhina & Omelchenko, 2008a; 2008b) are topical and the most common in modern society, it would be reasonable to dwell on them in more detail.

Literature Review

Fear is a universal phenomenon that is present in all spheres of human life, in social processes at the macro level. Unlike G. Allison (2013), who focused mainly on the negative role of fear, many researchers also note the decisive role of fear (Deriabin, 2014). T.R. Maltus (1993) believes that fear “warns of real danger, encourages you to take some action against it.” In particular, A.Ya. Antsupov and A.I. Shipilov (2004) write, “It is believed that not moderated by recklessness and courage, fear dooms a person only to cowardice. In fear, alienated from high feelings and passions, they see, mainly, the ability to generate cowardice and to hold down in despair the possibilities of resistance to evil”.

Among the many varieties of fear, political fear occupies a special place. W. James (2011) believed that political fear is “people experiencing the possibility of some damage to their collective well-being.” According to K. Clausewitz (2008), political fear can have far-reaching consequences. The assertion that political fear is an inherent feature of undemocratic regimes and that democratic states, by definition, are rid of it, is quite common (Ingemarson, 2014). D. Larison (2014) calls both the embodiment of liberalism and the departure from it: “Political fear, based on our constitutional provisions, is both an ally of American liberalism and its enemy since it undermines the nation’s desire for freedom and equality.” Speaking about the fears of politicians, S. Huntington (1998) uses the verbs which express uncertain actions. For example, the author says, “The West tries and will continue to try to maintain its high position and defend its interests, calling them the interests of the “world community.” The verb “try” and the verb pattern “will continue to try” reveal the weak point of the European politicians who, for a long time, have not been able to establish their recognition

in many countries of the world. K. Zigfeld (2010) makes a legal conclusion that it is fear that becomes such a convenient tool in politics that requires blind adherence.

M. Arif and N. Hayat (2017) assert that media framing on political communication is happening in international media scenarios. Political scientist B. Dreyfuss (2013) offers a classification of various types of fear on three grounds, “Physically threatening a person; threatening the longevity of the public order in which there is a person; creating a threat to the phenomenological sensation by a man of his place in the world.” The modern state, according to Ch.K. Chumley (2013), is responsible for the safety of its citizens. Fear as part of politics –how it is involved in the political process– not only legitimizes political action but also engenders it. According to T. Moss (2012), “Fear encourages us to take protective action, which gives the fear of immediacy and tangibility. Fear no longer occurs from outside; it penetrates inside, becomes a part of everyday reality”.

Fear, if not already, then rapidly becomes an essential object of analysis in comprehending modern politics. It provides an alternative legitimization of state power and its actions. In other words, fear allows us to justify those in power and to give meaning to their goals. P. J. Buchanan (2014), in “Americans don’t see Ukraine as their cause,” notes, “The discourse of fear has created a politics of fear whose sole purpose is to disorient and divide us. This impedes our critical thinking and prevents us from realizing that we can play any role in solving the problems we are facing. Instead, we were taught to point to another, vote for that politician, or support a group that – and supposedly no one else – can fix the situation.” Fear today constitutes the driving force and foundation of politics, crowding out other sources of legitimizing power, such as democracy, justice, and the public good.

Global War as One of the Types of Political Fears

Political fears are understood as emotions which arise in the situation of political threat within one state or in the international sphere. The media’s impact on the feelings and emotions of the addressee has carried out in the direction the addressee needs, namely, in informing about possible threats in the mass media and the formation of specific fears, real and neurotic fears, concerns of conscience, etc. The types of political fear include the following fears: fear of the state (fear of war, terrorism, and competition); fear of the politician (fear of struggle, destruction of harmonious relations and fear of self-exposure); political fear of the people (fear of the economic crisis before the end of the world).

In this article, we will consider the main political fears of the state in the contemporaneous American mass media. The political fear of the state is revealed in fear of war, terrorism, and competition. At the same time, the fear of war prevails in modern society. D. Rieff (2016) noted that even if President Obama was right when he said that terrorism did not pose an “existential threat to the United States or the world order.” Still, his statement is not much of a consolation, and people have good reason to be afraid. If we talk about the causes of wars, it should be noted that there are different theories according to which the leading causes can differ. Still, we should not forget that the basis of many theories of the causes of wars is the aggressive nature of man. It is activated by sublimation and projection, turning human discontent into prejudice and hatred of the other religions, races, ideas, and ideologies. According to this theory, the state creates and maintains a particular order in society while forming the basis for aggression in the form of war. War is the object of the fears of both the states, political leaders, and people who experience and express their fears in different ways. In this article, we will consider the way how the fear of the state before the war is covered in the American mass media. War is understood as a conflict between political entities such as states, tribes, political groups, etc., which

is implemented in the form of military (combat) actions and armed struggle (using the armed forces) between them (Butenko & Mironov, 1998) and as the continuation of the policy of violent means (Clausewitz, 2008).

In general, American media is mainly occupied about global war, the outcome of which does not bode anything good for the whole of humanity. The main research work on this subject is the work of S. Huntington, "The clash of civilizations" (1998). It should be noted that since the 1990s, this research work has been famous, and it may have had a significant impact on American society. The title of this research work predicts that the upcoming war will be global, and it will affect if not the whole world, but a considerable part of it. Unlike the other American authors who wrote about wars, S. Huntington (1998) does not speak about wars between tribes, states, or people, but about the war between two civilizations: West and East, between the Christian West and the Islamic East. He explains the causes of war by the aggressive essence of the person and notes that the main problem is the cultural distinction between countries. Some people want to preserve territorial integrity. The others want to profit from the wealth of the first ones, etc. Also, the author often uses aggressively colored vocabulary (fundamental differences, antagonistic relations, global war, the war of civilizations, and war of religions). The other American authors use similar expressions; for example, K. Zigfeld (2013) speaks about global war and uses the lexeme "revolution."

American Mass Media: The USA and Russia

The other bright examples that implement the agonal function through the tactics of threat, compromise, ignoring, etc., when creating an image of the enemy state, causing fear of the addressee (the population of a specific country, in this case, it is the USA), include: "The world in expectation of revolution" (Zigfeld, 2010); "The containment revival's strategic shortcomings" (Carden, 2014); "The delusions of American hawks" (Larison, 2014). How fear psychosis having a particular nation as the target is being subtly played out in American media can be discerned from a report filed by P. Baker (2017) in the New York Times. As P. Baker (2017) said, "The Obama administration will now shift its long-term approach to Russia from one of engagement to one of isolation in an attempt to limit Russia's "expansionist ambitions in its neighborhood" and effectively make it "a pariah state." He states that the country's administration is substantially reconsidering George F. Kennan's Cold War policy of containment to update it for today. The main idea is to form a global consensus against the revisionist international policy of modern Russia. It is noted that this approach, at first glance, is an example of more strategic planning, but in the long perspective, it will make it more difficult to ensure the US national interests in the long term and more critical areas (Carden, 2014).

In small periodicals, sometimes there are unexpected media statements: "Ukraine shares the blame for Russia's aggression" (Ingemarson, 2014). However, they do not stand out either for logic or consistency. From the article's context there follows the author's thesis that, by analogy with other countries of the former USSR, as well as with Switzerland, a higher standard of living in Ukraine than in Russia could restrain the strive of the inhabitants of the South-East and the Crimea for the "reunion." Everything that was said contradicts in this context the author's primary thesis about the "aggression" of Russia (Russia's aggression, annexation, subversive tactics of Vladimir Putin). At the same time, the author hides his real attitude to the current events, being in the trend of the American and European media, using inverted commas to express the irony of "reunification" because in the commonly

accepted world community at present there is the understanding of the events in the Crimea which is called “aggression” and “annexation” in The American and European mass media.

In the article “Americans don’t see Ukraine as their cause” in The American Conservative Journal (Buchanan, 2014), the journalist allows the addressee to determine who is a threat to whom, comparing the actions of both parties of the conflict. And further, the author (Buchanan) sums up President Obama’s and John Kerry’s efforts: “Yet, they continue to meddle where we do not belong, issue warnings and threats they have no power to enforce, and bluster and bluff about what they are going to do....” Speaking about propaganda efforts of the American mass media, one can cite the example of a frank article in Salon Journal under the telling title “Liberal media myth officially dead: Brazen propaganda, historical amnesia and the New York Times” (Smith, 2014).

American Mass Media: The USA and China

In the American mass media, especially in the interview with government officials, it also comes about China as a state that is a source of concern for the whole world. For example, “The world is worried about China,” “Economists are busily debating the usual: Will China have a hard or soft landing?” (Schuman, 2013). However, when implementing the agonistic function of intimidation of the addressee, there is the impression that China is not a threat. Still, it acts as a significant competitor since the representatives of the American linguistic culture in their majority do not allow the existence of any other superpower than the USA. At the same time, some American journalists cite the figures about the economic development of China, indicating a short time of significant achievements, sharing their fears with the addressee. G. Allison (2013) notes that in less than two decades, China has risen from sixth place among the world’s economies to second place, and it has every chance of overtaking the United States in the next decade.

The American politicians are afraid of any military confrontations with China. However, they believe that the Chinese army is unlikely to be able to counteract the American one, at least, because it has not been involved in any war since 1967. On the background of the growth of China’s military potential, according to many authoritative US mass media, America is afraid of China’s strengthening in the entire region. Given these apprehensions, on 3rd January 2012, the USA adopted a strategic document “Sustaining US leadership: Priorities for the 21st-century defense” (Sustaining U.S. ..., 2012). In this document, China is characterized as an aggressor (military vehicle, potential adversary).

T. Moss (2012) writes about China’s military state as a power: “On its current trajectory, China could overtake the United States as the world’s biggest military spender in the 2020s or 2030s. But there are too many unknown variables to accurately predict if this will happen.” In comparative terms which the author uses to describe China, there is a kind of mockery (paper tiger, fire-breathing dragon, a string of pearls) (Moss, 2012). In either case, the actual material shows that China is one of the countries with which the USA is afraid to wage war, but do not stop considering it as a political enemy.

One should note that the articles where Russia, China, and America figure as three superpowers that raise the topic of fear in the modern American mass media can become across rather often. This is especially clearly reflected in the headlines, for example: “The real reason to worry about China” (Kocherlakota, 2016), “United States, China compete for Russia’s favor” (Dreyfuss, 2013), “U.S. in cyberweapons race with China, Russia” (Chumley, 2013), etc. The media-addresser intentionally broadcasts the image of the external enemy in the mass media, so that the US population should switch the attention from internal problems of the state to external dangers.

Conclusion

The threat of war and the fear of war, as we can see, are proper to all states, including superpowers, in particular, the USA, that is demonstrated by the modern American mass media. It is found that the fear of the state before the power of another state determines both foreign and partially domestic policy. The actual material showed that the American mass media considered China as a rival. In contrast, the attitude towards Russia, expressed in the American mass media, contains more negative information (negative evaluative vocabulary, military metaphor, epithets, etc.). In the American mass media, Russia is regarded as a country that does not want to cooperate, but only provokes a superpower (metaphors, metonymy, simile, antinomies, etc.).

In the examples above, the verbalization of the fear of war and struggle through the tactics of implementation of the agonal function as the main methods of impact on opponents (tactics of threat, ignoring, compromise) is discernible. Politicians and journalists in mass media actively use various means of manipulation. The American mass media points to the fact that the fear of competition and the fear of losing power in the state is proper to every politician. The American politicians and journalists argue their apprehensions, give more specific answers to questions, in their speech, there are more figures, specific plans of action for the future are proposed to save one's life, to be protected before specific threat both in local (for example, inside the party), and state scale.

Thus, the cultivation of political media and change of attitudes in the minds of people through the broadcast of information about threats and dangers in different spheres of activity are quite possible in certain socio-political and economic conditions and massive propaganda in the mass media. This conclusion suggests a certain "pliability" and controllability of public consciousness and public mood, its stereotypical, mythological, and metaphorical character.

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