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## Semantics of Sensations in the Language of Mass Media

M. Bulgakov wrote in his novel "The Dog Heart":

It is impossible to do anything with an animal by terror no matter on what steps of development it stands. I approved it, I assert and I shall assert. They vainly think that terror will help them. No, no, it will not help, whatever it was: white, red and even brown! Terror completely paralyses the nervous system.

Presently terrorism, unfortunately, turns into an everyday show. "Those gapers who like to look on burnt people, aren't they also 'visual terrorists'?" (The Literary Newspaper, 12.09.00).

Language becomes the way of overcoming one's fear. Irony – a tested, although bitter medicine. The struggle of Arabs against Israel, once called *bloody intifada*, is now referred to as *peace process*, a bomb incorporated by terrorists – *a New Year's gift*, exploding houses – *fireworks*. Synonyms of terror multiply; times of terror change like seasons. Language bears witness to that. The "great French revolution" gave the world a word: *terror* – and together with it its symbols: *Robespierre* and the *guillotine*. In 1815 "after hundred days" and the following Bourbon restoration, the wave of "white terror" swept across France; this was the first time in history when the name for this movement was heard (Tarle 1939, p. 144). After the "October revolution" in Russia, there began times of *red terror* which, however, were named so only decades later; during those times, they were called *white terror*. The development of civilisation brings about increasingly refined ways to verbally conceal the essence of things. The language of *The Free Artist* paints terror in all colours of the rainbow: *Yellow terror* – the events in China during the cultural revolution; *red terror* – the activities of the Russian Federation's Communist Party and its followers; *black terror* – the movement of national patriots; *blue terror with a brown shade* – actions of militiamen in Novosibirsk against homosexuals.

Having generated “a society of performance”, the 20th century proved to be inconceivable before the opportunities of *visual, acoustical, tactile, and other sensual images* as means of authority.

Ordinary human consciousness is a multi-level phenomenon: It includes four basic components: sensor-receptive, logic-conceptual, emotional-estimated, and value-moral. Any of these phenomena of the surrounding world is at first perceived by sensory organs (it is either seen, or heard, or felt). It is then logically conceived as denotant; all possible logic connections of this object with other objects are established: Its categorisation (i.e., its reference to a certain class of objects) is made. Significantly, as perceived by the carrier of consciousness, prints of reality, including visual, acoustical, tactile, flavour-related, and olfactory images – senseables (B. Rassela's term) – are being embodied in language and, thus, become concepts and property not only of the separate person but also of the national culture.

Some linguistic facts illustrate the various interpretations of perceived senseables of language consciousness in different cultures. Distinctions are caused by features of a national way of thinking, of originality of the natural environment and material culture and, as a consequence, by an unequal choice of so-called points of reference, or the most typical prototypes of any given concept. Thus, *red* for an Australian person corresponds with red clay, for a Spaniard with bullfighting, and for a Russian with a red flag.

Words designating sensations of different modalities can cause corresponding sensations in people, that is, they may strongly influence them. Hence, the metaphors constructed on perception of colour, sound, smell, taste, and temperatures are very widely used in the language of politics or the mass media: *grey economy, has begun to smell fried, a smell of blood, a smell of money, bitter fruits of democracy, and sharp corners.*

“Now not only the attention of the West, but also sight, hearing, and sense of smell of all our citizens are for ever chained to the Kremlin” we read in *Ogoniok* (*Ogoniok* 11(4638), March 2000); or “Now, in the opinion of Oreshkin, a person without colour, without taste is necessary for the Kremlin, a person without a smell – Gryzlov can be such a person” (NPA).

Recently, colour adjectives are especially popular. In the article "A peacock's tail: An image of the Kazakhstan democracy" (The Capital Review, December 25, 1998) Azamat Karimov writes:

The closer January 10 gets, the more the political palette of Kazakhstan resembles the different colours of a peacock's tail. Here we have two kinds of red, and turquoise, and green ... along with some mixed colours that are so coarse that you cannot tell whether to count it as a plus or a minus. And all this only a short time before the elections promised by the President. God forbid that by then the wide spectrum of Kazakhstan's political palette will merely fade into one or two colours. For democracy is doomed without a wide-varied and stable party-political scene. One wonders, however, what the peacock-tail's colours will be in the autumn of the next year? And in the year 2005?

On the second place there is, perhaps, smell.

Many completely extraneous people with greedy **cold** eyes and insinuating manners have shown up in the Duma. They came here **on a smell of money**. (The Moscow member of Komsomol, 14.10.99)

Nenad Chanac, an unusually reliable and honest politician, who attributed a "certain musty smell" to the **pre-election struggle** between Koshtunica and Miloshevich, has advised fellow citizens to "**clamp their noses and vote** for the opposition." (The Independent Newspaper, 05.10.00)

In the last example, the euphemistic designation of a bad smell is interesting as it is, in turn, a metaphor of a dishonest pre-election campaign. The heading from "The Literary Newspaper", "Playing blind man's buff in a scientific way" is based on the same model: *to play blind man's buff – to lose visual perception – to deceive*.

Metaphors based on sensual perception play a major part in a strategy that aims to discredit an object by accusing it to cause unpleasant sensations to another object, therefore, expressing one's negative attitude towards it: *pre-election struggle with a musty smell, politics with a smack of communism*.

Berezovsky's action will turn out to be a **bright** soap bubble, which **will burst with a crash** before the eyes of the surprised public. (The Literary Newspaper, 12.09.00)

Dirty questions which **smell** like the terrible word 'impeachment'. (The Echo of The Planet, 21.05.98)

The collapse and rotting would continue, but **in the smelliest way** – under the cover of a repressive allied authority. (The Independent Newspaper, 10.06.00)

The perceptual lexis leads to a negative, subjective modality of the publicistic text, irrespective of the traditional polarisation of the established connotations of such concepts, for instance, *cold – hot, bitter – sweet, dark – light, loud – silent: cold war – a hot point, a bitter life – a sweet life, loud scandal – silent war.*

The second period – 1997 until August 1999 (before the aggression of the Chechen insurgents in Dagestan) – the period of a **“silent”** policy of the West concerning the crisis in Chechenia and the whole of Northern Caucasus. (The Independent newspaper, 29.02.00)

The former irresponsible, thoughtless, passive life was **“a sweet life”**, and today's intense, active, responsible, that is, adult life is a **“bitter”** life. (The Independent Newspaper, 25.03.00)

Every day someone commits a crime with just one purpose – to get money for the next fix. Every minute someone injects **sweet death** into his veins, and someone else receives money for it. (The Independent Newspaper, 15.02.2000)

Other Islamic countries have experienced the same: The hope for a **brighter future may bring back the belief in a golden past.** (The Independent Newspaper, 18.05.00)

When speaking about strengthening the influence of the state on the economy, one is involuntarily reminded of appeals from the **“bright”** past. But to return to a system of regional committees would be pernicious for Russia. (The Independent Newspaper, 17.03.00)

It is interesting that the word *aroma* in the language of the mass media is used mainly with a negative connotation: *barefaced aroma of a political conjuncture, a political cocktail with a strong aroma of oil, and aroma of a garbage dump (about the Chechen Republic).* On the other hand, the texts of the mass media often provide the conditions for the creation of words with ambiguous ideological colouring. The adjective *pink* may serve as an example. *Boys in pink panties* – a periphrasis of young democrats; *pink politics* – nearly communist.

One of the features of the modern language of Russian mass media over the last few years is the enforcement of negative emotions. Destructive tenden-

cies are displayed both at reference and language level. In particular, they are visible in the frequent co-occurrence of words like *colour*, *sound*, *taste*, and *smell* with words of certain semantic fields such as “war”, “death”, “criminal”, “authority”, and “money”: *colour of blood*, *sounds of a mourning march*, *a requiem*, *a cannonade*, *taste of blood*, *a smell of gunpowder and sulphur*, *war*, *money*, and *authorities*.

The cheerful and reckless childhood friend of times gone by, remembered by all as a nice idler, a playboy, poorly suitable for the big business, but having felt the **taste of the big money and the authorities**, was unexpectedly transformed into a gloomy “shark of capitalism”. (The Independent Newspaper, 11.03.00)

Many editorial collectives turned into owners of newspapers and magazines, suddenly having forgotten their former chiefs. But **freedom had a taste of the copper door handle. Or coins**. Freedom of the mass information has been understood by the “new Russian journalists” as a signal to plunder. (The Independent Newspaper, 10.06.00)

There was something to catch. In the speeches of most members from the western party, one could faintly hear **the sounds of a requiem on a world order** that for over five decades had been centered around the United Nations Organisation and the Security Council of the United Nations. (The Independent Newspaper, 05.11.99)

Ten years have passed. It seems improbable. Because then it seemed that time had stopped for ever, leaving behind the unique sounds of a standstill of time – the never-ending stutters of a machine gun, shouts, and groans of the dying and wounded and the drunk bedlam of soldiers, creating a bloody orgy. (The Independent Newspaper, 18.01.00)

The expression of the text is created by means of synaesthesia – the overlapping of sensations of different modalities that are realised in a synaesthetic metaphor: *the sweet word “expropriation”, to grope a figure of authority, rigid figurativeness, the luscious light, and the aggravated political sense of smell*. In the language of mass media, we find the conditions for the occurrence of a special type of synaesthesia (latent synaesthesia): *pink porridge* (pink – sweet – false), and *a trumpet smell* (loud – unpleasant copper pipes – authority).

In the language of modern mass media, a special mythology is formed based on the reconsideration of realities of the past or modern advertising and television shows and their use as socially significant symbols: *the book about a*

*tasty and healthy life* – a symbol embodying the Soviet myth about a happy and full life; *a bright way* – a word-combination frequently used in names of collective farms, now, created by advertising, a myth about the beginning of prosperity for Russia; *a sweet couple* – a representation myth about our lives being carefree or thoughtless – “*masquerade*”:

[...] in one of the areas of the Polish capital, in fact the largest and most influential. “**The sweet couple**” that used to govern here collapsed one month ago: a coalition of the movements “The Elective Action” and “Solidarity” (EAS) and the Union of Freedom (UF). (The Independent Newspaper, 27.05.00)

Now it no longer seems that the authorities still wish to press the oil companies into a “**masquerade**”. (The Work, 26.04.01)

Subsequently, the Snezhinskaja girl was **beaten** by the unidentified **fighters of the invisible front** that are still at large. (The Moscow Member of Komсомol, 25.04.97).

Here the romantic mythologema of the last years are used for the creation of ironical effects.

The political myths connected to the semantics of colour are also re-comprehended: New connotations appeared for the words *red*, *white*, *green*, *pink*, and *yellow*. The phraseological units include definitions based on colour, such as *pink glasses*, *the yellow devil*, or *the yellow house*, where the latent synonymic attitudes are based on the similarity of associations rather than on the affinity of lexical values. The authority is painted in all the colours of the rainbow: *pink Primakov*, *red Zyuganov*, *the Green Party*, *pink region with green streaks*; you can *feel funny smells* from authorities, *it leaves a bitter-sweet aftertaste*.

Colours change as in a magic lantern, and we indulge ourselves in this illusion – a deceit which is dearer to us than the “darkness of plain truth” – but does it ennoble us?

Let us hope that in the 21st century we will be able to explore the concepts of sensual perception from their joyful side, so that finally we may listen to heavenly sounds, feel the taste of time, and sense the aroma of an era.

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