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The Manipulative Potential of Stylistic Means in Contemporary Media Discourse

Маніпулятивний потенціал стилістичних засобів у сучасному медіадискурсі

Summary. *The article considers the manipulative potential of stylistic means in modern media discourse. Media discourse is a special type of communication, characterized by high manipulative potential. Despite the abundance of relevant literature on various aspects of manipulation, the study of the mechanisms of speech influence in the media remains in high demand in linguistics. The role of stylistic means which are the basis for implementing manipulation in mass communication remains on the periphery of scholarly research. This determines the relevance of the study devoted to a comprehensive analysis of stylistic figures and tropes that are used in media discourse to manipulate information.*

The object of the study is the texts of online editions of English-language newspapers, exerting manipulative influence on the reader. The subject of the research is stylistic linguistic means of information manipulation in media discourse. The aim of the study is to identify and describe the means of implementation of language and speech manipulation in English-language media discourse.

The authors of the article come to the conclusion that speech manipulation is a verbally expressed type of psychological influence of the sender of media discourse on its addressee, which results in the object of manipulation first having a desire or intention that is alien to him/her, leading to a certain personal benefit or psychological advantage for the manipulator. The manipulative potential manifests itself at different linguistic levels: morphology, lexis, syntax and semasiology.

Stylistic means of manipulation include metaphors, simile, personification, allusion, irony, litotes, antithesis, repetition, inversion, parallelism, parcelling,

etc. The choice of stylistic techniques of linguistic manipulation depends on the journalist's intentions, his/her desire to make the text more distinct, to enhance its expressiveness and manipulative potential in order to arouse confidence in the information presented or to impose his/her opinion on the addressee.

Key words: media discourse, manipulation, language influence, stylistic means.

Анотація. Стаття розглядає маніпулятивний потенціал стилістичних засобів у сучасному медіадискурсі. Медіадискурс є особливим типом спілкування, який характеризується високим маніпулятивним потенціалом. Незважаючи на значні здобутки вчених у вивченні різноманітних аспектів маніпулювання, питання аналізу механізмів мовного впливу в англомовних ЗМІ залишається нагальним у лінгвістиці. Роль засобів різних мовних рівнів, які є основою втілення маніпуляції у сфері ЗМІ, є не досить вивченими. Все це визначає актуальність цієї наукової розвідки, яка присвячена комплексному вивченню стилістичних засобів, що використовуються в медіадискурсі з метою маніпулювання інформацією.

Об'єктом дослідження є статті в онлайн-виданнях англомовних газет BBC та NBC, автори яких здійснюють маніпулятивний вплив на читача. Предмет дослідження – стилістичні мовні засоби маніпуляції інформацією в медіадискурсі. Мета дослідження полягає у виявленні та аналізі стилістичних засобів реалізації мовної та мовленнєвої маніпуляції в англомовному медіадискурсі.

Автори статті доходять висновку, що мовленнєва маніпуляція у медіадискурсі – це вербально виражений вид психологічного впливу автора новинного тексту на його реципієнта, результатом якого є виникнення в об'єкта маніпуляції чужого йому бажання або наміру, що призводить до отримання маніпулятором певної особистої вигоди чи переваги психологічного характеру. Маніпулятивний потенціал проявляється на різних мовних рівнях: морфології, лексики, синтаксису і семасіології.

На рівні семасіології маніпуляція здійснюється за допомогою таких стилістичних прийомів, як: метафора, персоніфікація, порівняння, алюзія, іронія, літота, антитеза, повтори, інверсія, паралелізм, парцеляція тощо. Вибір журналістом стилістичних засобів маніпулювання залежить від його намірів, прагнення надати статті більшої виразності, посилити експресивність та маніпулятивний потенціал тексту, вселити довіру до викладеної інформації чи нав'язати свою думку реципієнту.

Ключові слова: медіадискурс, маніпуляція, мовний вплив, стилістичний засіб.

Introduction. Media discourse is a specific type of discourse having a number of features that distinguish it from discourses of other types and acts as a distinctive communicative space, which is intentionally and stylistically diverse. In defining the specifics of media discourse, the manipulative function is considered to be one of its main functions. The phenomenon of language manipulation has repeatedly become the object of research by foreign and Ukrainian scholars. Thus, T. van Dijk (2006) and

O'Keefe (2002) consider general aspects of personality manipulation. O.V. Diachenko (2018) analyzes manipulative means in contemporary political discourse. V.V. Zirka (2005) studies the manipulative potential of advertising. Speech manipulation in mass communication has also become a subject of linguistic research (I.V. Bilyak (2012), O.S. Hrytsenko (2020), Yu.O. Omelchuk (2018), S. Ebadi (2014), M. Gevorgian (2011)). Academic papers mainly consider individual manipulative strategies and tactics. The techniques of psychological protection against manipulative influence are also addressed by scholars (H. Braiker (2004)).

Despite the significant body of literature devoted to various aspects of manipulation, the study of the mechanisms of speech influence in the media is in high demand in linguistics. The role of stylistic means which are the basis for implementing manipulation in mass communication remains on the periphery of scholarly research. This determines the relevance of the study devoted to a comprehensive analysis of stylistic figures and tropes that are used in media discourse to manipulate information.

The object of the study is the texts of online editions of English newspapers, exerting manipulative influence on the reader. The subject of the research is stylistic linguistic means of information manipulation in media discourse.

The aim of the study is to identify and describe the means of implementation of language and speech manipulation in English media discourse.

Methodology. A number of general scientific and linguistic methods have been used in the work: the method of continuous sampling of research material; methods of generalization and systematization of theoretical and factual material. Linguistic methods applied in the research include the method of definitional analysis, contextual analysis, and stylistic analysis, which allowed to identify the main stylistic means of manipulative influence in media discourse. The results of the study are presented in the paper using the descriptive method.

Results and Discussions. Media discourse is understood in our study as a set of semiotic and communicative parameters that determine the way of communication throughout the media space in the form of creating media texts, marked by the presence of stylistic features inherent to the language of mass media and communication and embodying a special way of reflecting the world via the mass media. S. Wadi and A. Ahmed note that "language and politics are indeed inseparable from one another. Without understanding language, it is not possible to understand politics, because politics exist in language" [18, p. 21].

According to Yu.O. Omelchuk, media discourse is manipulative by its nature, which is determined by its intentional orientation, i.e., the sender's desire to influence the addressee in a certain way. The researcher concludes

that media discourse is a "communicative phenomenon, and any communication is a purposeful influence, which allows achieving one of the objectives of this type of discourse – to form public opinion" [6, p. 30].

T. van Dijk notes that "manipulating people involves manipulating their minds, that is, people's beliefs, such as the knowledge, opinions and ideologies which in turn control their actions" [11, p. 365]. As a result of a person's interaction with another individual and society as a whole, his/her subjective characteristics (settings, needs, behavior, attitudes, etc.) are changed.

Manipulation is a psychological influence consisting in the skilful use of language means, which results in an implicit violation of a person's intentions, contrary to his/her real desires. Taking into account a particular interest in the linguistic means of expressing manipulation in media discourse, we define speech manipulation as a verbally expressed type of psychological influence of the sender of the message on its recipient, as a result of which the object of manipulation initially has an alien desire or intention, leading to obtaining the planned result through a certain personal benefit, or benefit of a psychological nature by the subject of manipulation. Since all human interaction is related to communication, we should consider manipulation as a sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic phenomenon, and the linguistic means (language representation) through which manipulation is carried out is an important component of manipulation as a mode of influence.

Manipulative potential manifests itself at such traditionally existing speech levels as morphology, lexis, syntax and semasiology. The semasiology level is presented by various tropes and figures of speech (hyperbole, meiosis, metonymy, metaphor, irony, simile, synonyms, accentuation, oxymoron) which are used in the manipulator's speech with the aim of "decorating" and creating more vivid images in speech [8, p. 122]. Indeed, tropes are a means of creating images. A special role as a means of interpreting reality belongs to metaphors, neologisms, and jargon, replacing the rational component in the construction of the image of reality with the emotional one.

In terms of realizing the manipulative potential in media discourse, journalists employ various means of expression: metaphors, similes, personification, allusion, irony, litotes, antithesis, repetitions, inversion, parallelism, parcelling, etc., which add more expressiveness to the text and enhance its manipulative potential [7].

Metaphor is a convenient means of information manipulation because it is a ready-made image with embedded associations [15, p. 45], example: *"We know from research that social media sites and apps increase the release of dopamine in our brains, which gives us a jolt of pleasure. When*

*we connect a behavior to our sense of pleasure, we want **to scratch the itch repeatedly**, and withdrawal is painful"* [9]. In the given example, the addiction to social media is identified with a rash that bothers a person.

Human cognition of reality is anthropocentrically oriented, which is manifested in the use of personification. Personification in the broad sense is understood not only as "humanization", but also as endowing abstract entities and inanimate objects with the properties of living beings. A common personification in media discourse is the personification of abstract concepts as individuals, for example: "*An **economic recovery** under threat from the delta variant of the coronavirus **got a shot in the arm** this week from an unexpected source: food stamps"* [16].

A simile is a comparison of one object or phenomenon to another. In the analysed newspaper title below, this means of expression is used to evaluate the political situation caused by Brexit: "*From Europe, **Brexit is like 'watching a car crash in slow motion'**"* [16]. Such similes lead the reader to the preconceived conclusion that the situation is catastrophic. Consequently, the simile creates a negative attitude toward the events or phenomena portrayed.

A simile is additional emotive information, expressing the subjective evaluation of the author of the article and evoking a chain of associations in the mind of the addressee, for example: "*Your brain functions a lot **like the Internet or a network of friends**, scientists said Tuesday"* [9].

Journalists may employ simile based on the citations of authoritative figures which entails even greater manipulative potential. Thus, in one of BBC's recent articles dealing with the information on European Union members' having agreed to cut gas use, the author uses an EU diplomat's quote comparing the agreement with Emmental cheese. The figurative image is based on the feature of this type of cheese which has a lot of holes implying that this agreement is packed full of compromises: *"This plan looks **like Emmental cheese"**, one EU diplomat told me* [9].

An allusion is understood as an expression, a reference to a well-known real fact, historical event, a literary work. The following example taken from the above mention article illustrates the allusion to a well-known film: *This was not a **Mission Impossible***!", tweeted the Czech Republic, which holds the rotating EU presidency* [9].

Let us consider another example of allusion: "*The **law of the jungle** cannot last eternally", said Immigration Minister Eric Besson, who ordered the destruction of what he called "a lawless zone where smugglers reign."* [9]. Most recipients familiar with R. Kipling's legacy, namely his work "Mowgli", will easily recognize the allusion, which is defined as "a code that dictates survival by any means possible and that is presumed to be in effect among animals in their natural state or people unrestrained by any established law or civilized personal or civic control" [14].

An irony is a form of humour in which the critical attitude to the object of ridicule, unlike humour, is judgmental and appears in a somewhat veiled form, for example: "*In July 2016, following Booker's speech at the Democratic National Convention – during which the senator took shots at the then-GOP-nominee – Trump tweeted a cryptic critical message **that left pundits scratching their heads***" [16]. The irony in the example allows the author to convey his attitude toward the situation – disapproval, condemnation – in a disguised form.

The object of ridicule is usually a significant event or a famous person, such as presidential elections or presidential candidates: "*The campaign also runs the risk of setting the bar too low for Biden, 77, by portraying him as someone who should **be confined to a nursing home** – a frequent attack line by Trump, 74*" [16]. *"If Trump keeps beating the cognitive drum and **Biden shows up and completes sentences at the debate**, it's game over," said Mark McKinnon, George W. Bush's chief media adviser in 2004*" [16].

The repetition of lexical units is used by the manipulator as a deliberate stylistic means (as opposed to accidental repetition of lexemes in oral speech). Its function is to enhance expression since the repeated lexeme draws the addressee's particular attention to the message, for example: *"There's **literally** nobody in this room", Tapper responded. "There is **literally** not one person in this studio"* [9].

Among the syntactic repetitions, we single out anaphora, chiasmus, anadiplosis, and epiphora, illustrated in the following example: "*The CIA **knew**. The State Department **knew**. Senior congressional officials and the British government were briefed*" [16].

Anaphoric repetition is based on the intentional reproduction of an element already highlighted within the actual sentence division and placed at the beginning of the utterance: "***Nowadays**, though, political alternatives do exist – including a modern communist one. **Nowadays**, it is quite possible to make a career without a party affiliation*" [16]. The repetition of the same statements fixes the received information in the reader's mind.

Repetition can be distant, as the same construction is repeated by journalists after a certain period of time, which adds even more tension to the situation, for example: *"**A key difference** is the ideology underpinning Russia's stance in the world. Communism has been traded for conservatism – Putin paints Russia as the healthy opposite of a lawless, immoral West. State-endorsed religion also plays an important role, with traditionalist values touted as an alternative to the "godless" Western tolerance. And that is a **key difference**"* [9].

Parallelism is the association of two or more sentences (or their parts) by strictly matching their structure – grammatical and semantic. The parallel structures impart the text with dynamism, greater expressiveness,

and intensify its expressive nature [2]. In addition, it may be noted that parallel constructions accentuate the reader's attention to certain elements of the utterance, for example: *"**We're not going to control** the pandemic. **We are going to control** the fact that we get vaccines, therapeutics and other mitigations", Meadows said, adding: "It is a contagious virus, just like the flu"* [16].

Parcelling is used to enhance the expressiveness of an utterance, although this stylistic device is not often used in media discourse. Parcelling emphasizes and stresses the most important information, for instance: "*There is plenty of tape the Biden campaign can replay. Of Trump appearing to have cognitive issues"* [9].

Stylistic inversion, a deliberate change in the traditional word order of a sentence to emphatically highlight a particular component, is a means of strong conceptual emphasis [2, p. 138], for example: *"**Realistically,** the U.S. would look for ways to respond short of launching a nuclear weapon, possibly through cyber operations or other support for Ukraine, said Gottemoeller"* [16].

In the given context, we observe the emphatic singling out of the structural-semantic element, implemented by shifting the adverbial of time to the initial position: "*This penalty has been applied before, and **never before did** the NFL suspend players for ball violations"* [16]. Due to the inverted word order in the sentence, the adverbial modifier "never before" acquires additional meaning and emphatic quality.

The expressive potential of enumeration as a stylistic means is manifold: it is used as a means of language economy in colloquial speech, as a rhetorical figure in oratory, and as a means of highlighting and emphasizing the most important information in almost any type of discourse, e.g.: "*Jeffrey Edmonds, an expert on the Russian military at the CNA think tank, says there are four possible response scenarios, only two of which are plausible: Capitulate and sue for peace; stay the course with sanctions and pressure; mount a conventional attack to punish Russia; respond with a nuclear attack on Russia"* [16]. The enumeration allowed the journalist to highlight the most significant information representing, in his view, the most likely scenarios to end the war.

Significant manipulative potential in media discourse is found in litotes, which is a way of asserting a positive attribute. It often includes a word that expresses a concept, the features of which can be characterized negatively. Litotes in media discourse allows for a less categorical judgment, e.g.: "*What will Biden do if Putin goes nuclear? Experts say a nuclear response **is unlikely but not impossible"*** [16]. The use of litotes intensifies the negative component of meaning and makes it possible to compare things that are not inherently comparable.

The analysis of media discourse reveals that manipulation is often realized through a combination of different stylistic means. In the following example, the influence on the reader is implemented with the help of metaphor (*beacon of hope*, etc.), personification (*world that needs*) and parallelism (*a beacon of hope, a beacon of possibility, a beacon of relief*), e.g.: "*During a Friday signing ceremony in Istanbul, Guterres hailed the deal as "a **beacon of hope**, a **beacon of possibility**, a **beacon of relief** in a **world that needs** it more than ever"* [16].

Summing up, the study of stylistic linguistic means is an important factor in the analysis of the manipulative effect on the recipient in media discourse. The analysed stylistic figures and tropes do not exhaust the entire list of expressive means in the media, based on the mechanism of manipulative effect, and require further research.

Conclusions. Manipulation is one of the methods of speech influence. Having analysed numerous definitions offered by different scholars, we can conclude that manipulation is the covert control of people against their will in order to change their perception or behavior or to obtain a one-sided benefit. The covert nature of manipulation is the main condition for its successful implementation.

The study distinguishes the elements and units of manipulative influence in modern media discourse. The conducted research reveals that the phenomenon of speech manipulation in media discourse requires consideration of the main techniques of manipulation affecting a person's intellect, will and emotions.

Stylistic means of manipulation include metaphors, simile, personification, allusion, irony, litotes, antithesis, repetition, inversion, parallelism, parcelling, etc. The choice of stylistic techniques of linguistic manipulation depends on the journalist's intentions, his/her desire to make the text more distinct, to enhance its expressiveness and manipulative potential in order to arouse confidence in the information presented or to impose his/her opinion on the addressee.

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