

Shared Identities: Our Interweaving Threads



Linguistic strategies in discourse about Russia

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Communicative strategies, ways of planning communication with a certain aim in view, are reflected in the choice of language means which I qualify as linguistic strategies. My analysis is based on the publications of the American magazine *Newsweek* about Russia and its relations with other countries (2006-2008). Verbalization of communicative strategies in the discourse of *Newsweek* about Russia is determined by liberal values which influence the creation of the specific image of Russia.

コミュニケーションストラテジー (communicative strategies)、ある目的を持ってコミュニケーションを図る方法は、筆者が本稿で言語ストラテジーと認める言語表現に反映される。筆者の分析は米国の雑誌「Newsweek」に載せられたロシア、また他国との関係に関する記事(2006-2008)を基にしているものだ。Newsweekのロシアに関するディスコースのコミュニケーションストラテジーの口上化は、ロシアのイメージの作成に影響を与える自由主義的価値 (liberal values)によるものだ。

Communicative strategies are communicative intentions which are realized in communicative systems with the help of language and stylistic means. The discourse about Russia realizes its own communicative strategies, “a certain common and at the same time special communicative goal and corresponding discursive means” (Silantiev, 2004, p. 20). The liberal discourse of *Newsweek* is based on the sum of political ideas and on the main ideological doctrine of the West – liberalism. “Liberalism... has become the philosophical basis of the core of contemporary western social and economic life” (Scollon & Scollon, 2005, p. 102). The factor influencing the attitude of the USA towards other countries is its national self-image (De Vos, 1997; Gans, 1988). These tendencies are starting points of journalists of *Newsweek*. Linguistic strategies (choice of words, metaphorization, use of epithets, phraseologisms, antonymy) are the language actualization of communicative intentions. The scope of the material of my investigation is

restricted to the international life of Russia, its connections, and interrelations with the countries of the “near abroad” (Georgia, Ukraine, and Belarus), the West (Europe and the United States), the East (China), and the South (Africa). Twenty-odd articles of *Newsweek* are devoted to Russia every year; approximately half of them describe the international life of Russia, but references to interrelations of Russia with the West penetrate all the publications about Russia.

Ideological and cultural foundations of discourse about Russia

The notion of discourse may be interpreted in various ways, as a cognitive, pragmatic, linguocultural, and sociolinguistic phenomenon: “... the study of discourse is a huge field” (Van Dijk, 1997, p. xi). When we apply social factors which belong to extralinguistic aspects and determine the character of the text, we deal with the functional and sociolinguistic approach to the notion of discourse. Halliday (1991) is considered to be the founder of interpreting discourse as the text together with extralinguistic factors. The sociolinguistic approach to exploring discourse presupposes the analysis of participants of communication as representatives of a social group and the analysis of the circumstances of communication in a broad sociocultural context (Burton, 1980). “Critical discourse analysis sees discourse... as a form of ‘social practice’. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258). The purpose of critical discourse

analysis is to move beyond the textual interpretation of the patterned uses of language to explanation of the ideological foundations. I qualify the discourse of *Newsweek* as liberal: the texts are written by people sharing views, values, and ideas of liberalism. “Classical theoretical liberalism is the view, which has a long history, that individuals are, or should be, free, autonomous, rational actors, each pursuing their own self-interest” (Lakoff, 1996, p. 19).

Individualism in its foreign policy aspect is seen in “considering the existence of one’s own national-political community as a self-goal but the existence of other similar communities as a means for its realization” (Batalov, 1990, p. 180).

Farid Zakaria, one of the leading authors of *Newsweek*, writes:

America is the global rule-maker... Today the United States sees its mission in globalizing the world. Generations from now... historians... might note that by the turn of the 21st century, the United States had succeeded in its great historical mission – globalizing the world. (May 12, 2008, p. 29)

Communicative and linguistic strategies

The system of liberal values in the discourse about Russia has its specific realization through the use of certain communicative strategies and their expression in linguistic strategies.

I single out several communicative strategies in the discourse about Russia. “Strategies are a part of our common knowledge... Strategies form an open list. New types of

discourse and forms of communication can require new strategies” (Van Dijk, 1988, p. 164). The strategy of defamation is dominant in the discourse of *Newsweek* about Russia. “Strategy of defamation may be considered in the frames of global strategy in the field of perlocution which may be defined as downplay” (Issers, 2008, p. 160). The other strategies also help to create the corresponding model of Russia’s image: strategies of polarization, allegory, and limitation of information. The same linguistic means may be employed to express different communicative intentions or communicative strategies. Metaphorization, for example, is a very effective instrument of defamation, allegory, and polarization.

The realization of Russia’s relations with the “near abroad” in communicative and linguistic strategies

The main communicative strategy revealing Russia’s relations with the countries of “the near abroad” is defamation.

The realization of the strategy of defamation

Lexical means of verbalizing this strategy are realized in the first turn through the semantic field of **confrontation**: “The common theme is that Russia has always chosen confrontation” (Mar. 10, 2008, p. 39). The information about Russia as “the Biggest Bully” (Mar. 10, 2008, p. 39) is clearly seen in the large semantic field **confrontation**, **conflict** emphasizing the idea of violation: “to impose sanctions, order gas supplies cut off, use energy as a weapon, plan a coup, delay visas for Georgians, raise gas prices”, etc. The words “threat, threaten” arouse the feeling of danger

and fear, especially when the subject of threat is nuclear weapons: “The Kremlin’s key threat: to slap tariffs on Belarusian goods exported to Russia” (Jan. 22, 2007, p. 16). “Putin’s latest gambit – to threaten to point nuclear weapons at Ukraine if it joins NATO...” (Mar. 10, 2008, p. 39). All these conflicts may lead to sad and tragic results, the initiator of which turns out to be Russia, and that is expressed in the lexemes “to ruin, to destroy, war, warfare”.

Lexical formations constructing the lexico-semantic field *confrontation* contain rational assessment on the basis of the criterion of norm: right/wrong, normal/abnormal, because any form of confrontation or violence is accepted by people as an anomaly. Emotive-evaluative adjectives and nouns make up the core of the evaluative vocabulary: “Vladimir Putin’s bellicose language and aggressive style has cost Russia friends in the neighborhood” (Mar. 10, 2008, p. 39), “...the brutality of Putin’s slapdown on Lukashenko..., the Kremlin’s high-handedness...” (Jan. 22, 2007, p. 18).

The strategy of allegory

The strategy of allegory is realized through metaphorization and the use of phraseological units with transferred meaning: “...foreign interference would not be tolerated in Russia’s backyard... Russia suspended imports of Ukrainian meat - another small turn of the screw” (Jan. 30, 2008, p. 24).

The strategy of polarization

The strategy of polarization (contrast) manifests itself in describing contradictory aspects of Russia: strength and weakness. Different linguistic strategies are used in this case:

metaphorization, antonymy, and contradictory conjunctions: “The picture, long term, is of a goliath that doesn’t quite recognize its days of dominance cannot last” (Jan. 22, 2007, p. 18), “Putin posed as a powerful, influential big brother but Russia’s muscles turned out to be fake” (Mar. 10, 2008, p. 39).

The strategy of limitation of information

The strategy of limitation of information is felt in scarce facts about the actions against Russia on the part of some neighboring countries: “Tbilisi declared that it would oppose Russian membership in the World Trade Organization” (May 8, 2006, p. 22).

Commentary

Through all the descriptions of relations with Georgia, Ukraine, and Belarus, there is seen another background aspect: the relations of Russia with the West, Europe and the USA. The West, the United States in particular, looks on the former Soviet republics as being on the sphere of their geopolitical aims: “In the US view, it seems, Russia has become a major obstacle to America’s geostrategic interests” (Apr. 10/Apr. 17, 2006, p. 29). The principle of national individualism is revealed here to a full extent: Russia is refused the right to have its own political interest in borderline zones, with which it has been closely connected for centuries. And the opinion of Aleksandr Khomenko, head of cultural programs at Roszarubezh Center, sounds quite well-grounded: “We are being kicked out for political reasons. No matter what we try to do, neighboring states have anti-Russian agendas” (Jun. 9, 2009, p. 31).

The realization of Russia’s relations with the West in communicative and linguistic strategies

The standpoint of the information in *Newsweek* about Russia and the West is that Russia has become an active participant in a battle for influence in the world: “A battle for influence – or new Great Game between Moscow and the West – now stretches from the Arctic to the Middle East and Central Asia” (Jul. 23, 2007, p. 24).

The main topic in this case is **power in the world arena**, a struggle for influence in the world: “...geopolitics is a struggle for influence: as other nations become more active internationally, they will seek greater freedom of action... America is the global rule-maker but doesn’t always play by the rules” (May 12, 2008, p. 29). The Great Game (The Cold War) originates from the 19th century “hoary Great Game”, but nowadays its character is modified in accordance with the spirit of the time: “The hoary Great Game is back, pitting Russia, the United States and Europe in a tug-of-war over energy” (Jul. 3/Jul. 10, 2006, p. 28). The author of the article with the “speaking” title “The Politics of Pipelines”, Owen Mathews, writes: “But beyond all this lies a bigger geopolitical game being waged as aggressively as the old cold war. Today’s tug of war features energy...” (Jul. 3/Jul. 10, 2006, p. 28). The sphere of geopolitics is verbalized in the lexical units of the thematic field *geopolitics*, including the combinations “geostrategic interests, geopolitical game, Great Game, geopolitical clout, a double game, ambitious power plays, the greatest geopolitical catastrophe, geopolitical risk, geopolitical intrigues, geopolitical ambitions”.

The strategy of sale

The communicative strategy aimed at stating the essence of the relations between Russia and the West may be called the strategy of sale. “The strategy of sale is the strategy of political communication, in which arguments seem objective...: on the one hand, they don’t defend the position of the communicator, and on the other, don’t criticize the position of the opponent” (Zernetsky, 2000, p. 195). The strategy of sale regards an object of communication (a struggle for one’s own geopolitical interests) as a fragment of reality: “Kosovo is set to become the latest showdown between Russia and the West” (Feb. 4, 2008, p. 22), “Washington and Moscow are once again vying for power” (Jul. 23, 2007, p. 24). The verbal representation of the strategy of sale shows that though the opposing partners are “rivals” or “players”, but there seems to be a certain balance: “A number of other countries are caught in a tug of war between the United States and Russia as both sides seek to expand their spheres of influence in this strategically crucial area” (Jul. 23, 2007, p. 25). Nevertheless more than once the idea about geopolitical shifts is declared: “The world will never be quite the same. The political shifts are striking... Balances of political power are shifting...” (Dec. 2006-Feb. 2007, p. 30). “Power everywhere is moving from the center to the periphery” (Dec. 2006-Feb. 2007, p. 35).

The strategy of defamation

The strategy of sale cannot be considered as dominant. A certain reaction to the battle for geostrategic interests makes the strategy of defamation a leading one.

The authors of *Newsweek* concentrate their attention on characteristics of Russia as a geopolitical rival, emphasizing its might and its aspirations to become a superpower again. The adjective “resurgent” is often used forming together with lexemes “restore, assertiveness, Empire, imperial might”, the image of a mighty power, Russia, whose ambitions may become dangerous for its neighbors: “Many in the West (and in Moscow) see Russia as a resurgent power, pumped up by oil money and flexing its muscles around the world” (Jun. 9, 2008, p. 31).

The estimation of Russia’s status is drawn to the negative vector; the units “Empire, resurgent power, imperial might” combine with expressions implying the idea of rough force: “flex one’s muscles; strike back, throw one’s weight around: The Empire Strikes Back. A confident Kremlin is throwing its weight around” (Jan. 30, 2006, p. 24).

In the process of the “Great Gas Game” (Dec. 2006-Feb. 2007, p. 60) the actions of Moscow are expressed by the lexemes “threat, fear, sabre-rattling, seize the control, cause tremor, lock in”, the strategy of defamation of Russia being realized: “That’s triggered old German fears of Moscow’s domination” (Jan. 23, 2006, p. 27).

In this geopolitical battle the USA pursues the strategy of containing Russia: “Not everything is going Moscow’s way” (Jul. 3/Jul. 10, 2006, p. 29).

The strategies of allegory and polarization

The communicative strategies of allegory and polarization sometimes go hand in hand when metaphors and similes referring to Russia emphasize its strength and weakness at

the same time: “Gazprom, the Russian natural Gas Giant is often portrayed as the 1,000-pound gorilla of the energy world. For all its pretensions to being Europe’s dominant energy supplier, Gazprom has stood on feet of clay” (Dec. 31/Jan. 7, 2008, pp. 54-55).

The realization of Russia’s relations with the East and the South in communicative and linguistic strategies

China seems to be the most important Eastern country as far as Russia is concerned. The USA is worried about the double policy of Russia to the West and the East. South Africa also becomes an object of geopolitical game and economic interests.

The strategies of polarization and allegory

The leading communicative strategy interpreting the relations of Russia with China is polarization (contrast). The strategy of representing Russia as an energetic superpower goes on, but the opposite modus of depicting Russia as a dependent, weak country comes into action: “...the Russian president... presenting Russia as a reliable energy partner and playing the superpower alongside the big hitters of the democratic, industrialized world...” (Mar. 27, 2006, p. 13).

Linguistic strategies which verbalize the idea of strength and weakness of the same object of description embrace, in the first turn, adversative conjunctions bearing the meaning of contradictoriness (yet, but) and combinations implying the opposite sense (“on the surface”): “On the surface, Russia seems to take the laurel, playing an energy-hungry East and West to its advantage... Yet for all its new bullishness,

Moscow looks East with a fearful eye” (Mar. 27, 2006, p. 13).

The next linguistic strategy transmitting the communicative strategy of polarization is the use of words and collocations of the lexical fields with opposite meanings: “dominance” and “threat”, “dependence” and “fear”. Russia turns out to be dependent on China; it experiences fear whereas China dominates in economy and is a threat to Russia in this aspect: “...Russia is becoming dependent on China...; Moscow looks East with a fearful eye; Russia is shifting...to a junior partner of China; ...Russia is being pulled into China’s economic and political orbit” (Mar. 27, 2006, pp. 13-15).

The change of evaluative vectors is seen in the model “Noun + hungry”. The combination “bargain-hungry Russian babushkas” replace the frequently used combinations “energy-hungry Europe, energy-hungry West”: “...in the markets of Khabarovsk bargain-hungry Russian babushkas even know the Chinese names for the vegetables they buy from Chinese traders” (Mar. 27, 2006, p. 14). The communicative strategy of defamation of Russia, expressing contempt, is realized here as well.

China in this opposition takes the place of a resurgent power: “Chinese investment threatens to swamp Russia’s dysfunctional economy...; China is grabbing other Russian assets...; ...the Chinese threat to “Mother Russia” (Mar. 27, 2006, pp. 13-15).

This opposition joins the general line of describing geopolitical interests of the most powerful players on the geopolitical arena. Russia’s place here seems to be uncomfortable and comfortable at the same time, which the

communicative strategy of allegory vividly shows through the use of metaphors and phraseologisms with transferred meanings: “So Russia finds itself in an awkward place, stranded between two poles, east and west; China’s soaring energy needs would seem to put Russia in the catbird seat” (Mar. 27, 2006, pp. 14-15).

A new turn in the description of the Great Game involves South Africa as a place of struggle for world dominance, and that is reflected in the metaphoric subtitle of the article “The Oligarchs Go on Safari”: “Russians take their place alongside the Chinese in a battle for resources to fuel their growing empires” (Oct. 15, 2007, p. 34). Russia here is depicted in the negative light as a conqueror (together with China, India, and Brazil), as a new type of colonialist: “Today, emerging-market giants are fighting for oil, gas and metal ore in Africa as energetically as 19th century European colonialists grabbed land on the continent. ...it’s unclear what else the new conquerors will make of Africa’s future” (Oct. 15, 2007, pp. 34-35). Russia is again qualified as an ambitious state yearning for dominance: “Moscow begins to give both the West and Beijing a run for money in the race for Africa’s riches; ...a Kremlin eager to build economic empires...; ...rich Russian companies want to extend their global reach” (Oct. 15, 2007, p. 34). Africa becomes a dependent country: “this time tying African nations to the purse strings of emerging-market powers” (Oct. 15, 2007, p. 35).

Conclusion

Summing up the results of the analysis I should say that the communicative and linguistic strategies realized in *Newsweek* make up the image of Russia in a one-sided way: as a country with imperial ambitions, as a country “bullying” its neighbors, using oil and gas to intimidate Europe, as a country trying to extend its global influence. We may qualify the discourse of *Newsweek* about Russia as a peculiar metonymical outlook. The vocabulary of the authors of *Newsweek* does not change much whether they write about Russian relations with “the near abroad”, “energy-hungry” Europe or South Africa.

Pedagogical implications of the research

It is important in English language teaching to show learners of English how differences in cultures influence the presentation of ideological domains. This contributes to better revealing the identity of learners of English, especially journalists, sociologists, and politologists and to improving their communicative competence in the target language. The text-book for students “Russia in the English-Speaking Mass Media” is in process of creation. The material of my research serves as a text basis supplemented by a cluster of various exercises concerning, for instance, Chinese immigration and the battle for resources.

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