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Discursive Analysis of Social Policy, Represented in Contemporary Russian Mass Media

Introduction

This paper is an attempt to define the semantic space of social policy, which is reflected and represented in Russian media-discourse. The aim of the discursive analysis was to determine the representations of social policy pattern by means of transformed language. Due to the social, political and economic development of Russia and the number of newspaper publications that have been devoted to social problems and the essence of social policy, the functioning of these and the measures taken have been increased significantly. No doubt, that resolutions, adopted by Russian government in the field of social policy are directed to make the situation better. From linguistic viewpoint these resolutions are correct and traditional. On a contrary, the language of newspapers and magazines can give the sociologist a kind of “real picture”, of what is happening now, in the frame of qualitative method. We analysed those patterns, which were used by journalists with the purpose to make the publications more gaudy and “aggressive” in order to manipulate the audience, in particular, to construct the semantic space of contemporary social policy in Russia.

It must be taken into consideration that the press is one of the strongest instruments for spreading information, which also influences and forms public opinion. Such functions of press discourse can be differentiated as directing and manipulating, which represents and constructs public viewpoint

towards social policy at present. Manipulative function of media-discourse helps to form public opinion with the aim to provide the desired point of view.

There are several approaches to the definition of discourse, and several methodology of analysis. The method of analysis used in this study is based on the concept of “discourse” elaborated by: R. Bart [2000], R. Blackar [1987], T.A. van Dijk [2000], M. Foucault [1996], R. Scollon and S.W. Scollon [1997]. In particular, we adopt a conception of discourse as: “a communicative action, which unites purposes, goals and objectives of communicators, and their cultural, social, geographical knowledge, etc.” [van Dijk, 2000]. The basic conceptions of social policy, as developed by the following Russian sociologists were used as methodological points of reference: T. Zaslavskaya [2002], N. Pokrovsky [1998], O. Shkaratan [2001], V. Iarskaia [1998].

It was important for the analysis to define the hidden meaning of different lexical units used in social policy description, combining them with the analyst’s interpretation and experts’ viewpoints.

The description of data and the method of analysis

The data analysed in this study refer to four Russian social and political sections from the two newspapers “Izvestia” and “Komsomolskaya Pravda”, and from the two magazines “Profile” and “Rossiyskaya Federatsiya Segodnia”. The time period of analysed articles is from 2001-2002, using a total number of twenty-two articles for analysis.

Contemporary discursive analysis helps to study and describe different discourse structures and strategies, which are typical of political and media language. Further, it makes it possible to correlate them within the social and

political context. They were analysed through a detailed discourse analysis [Van Dijk, 2000], pointing out the manipulative intents of the text.

Several 'discursive devices' were found: headings of articles and columns, the choice of lexical units - metaphors, epithets, punctuation, grammatical devices, which were used in the description and construction of the social policy semantic pattern.

The analysis

News topics in the press, concerning social policy, are usually formulated in the titles of rubrics, articles and reports that play exclusive roles in informative space. It is important to mention that the process of democratisation in society influences journalists' manner and methods of writing in order to attract audience attention. One of the things that are displayed is the use of colloquial language against a background of a steady journalist's style. Along with legitimating of many topics, such a gaudy and aggressive style of writing guarantees numerous audience and advertising of definite social actors, articles, journalists and edition as a whole.

Plenty of metaphors, epithets, phraseological and stereotyped vocabulary are widely used in titles, which have the main goal of representing the information in a compressed form [2].

Keeping its traditional functions: nominal, inducement for communication, the title becomes compressed text with a cultural background, moreover it appeals to readers' memories and breaks away from steady frames of common definition. Changing titles around helps journalists induce the readers' interest. The main method of such intentional transformations can be named as remodelling (use of colloquial words, mixing different speech styles), occasionalism (consonant words and

phrases), additional expressions by means of special punctuation, phrases from songs and poems, apocopic citing [2]. Marked topics of articles with correspondent titles and wide subtitles often provide better perception and understanding of release by audience. But there is a kind of risk as a low-key or uninteresting title could have the opposite effect, an absence of readers wishing to look through the article.

Different areas in social policy

The titles of publications under this analysis could be conventionally divided into several thematic groups:

- * education (its availability, the level of peoples literacy and the perspective of educational reforms);
- * neglected children,
- * quality of life (unemployment, wealth and poverty);

We will provide some examples from the first two thematic groups.

Education

Among these topics education is prioritised, represented in the titles and in the bodies of articles as well in the four editions under analysis. By means of occasionalism, i.e. consonant words, the manipulative function of titles carries out and forms reader opinion: «Hungry Belly of Teacher is Deaf to Pupil» [3]. The implicit reason for this statement, from the journalists' viewpoint, lies in low teacher's salary (that's why he/she is always "hungry"), so the teacher can't work well and fulfil his duties. Political ethics must be kept in mind, which demand definite norms of public speech [4].

In describing teachers with the help of such epithets as «hungry», "poor", and intentionally declining from political ethics, journalists are constructing the stereotype of a selfless fighter in the educational field:

“What is the Future of the Country, Where the Teacher is Hungry and Poor?” [5].

In accordance with N. Pokrovsky, we should underline that in spite of this negative description, “there are a lot of excellent teachers, perfect courses in leading universities. But this level is also achieved by means of social sacrifice, not only by teachers’ hard working in comfortable conditions. Can we build our life on the basis of sacrifice?” [6].

The press proves the thesis about sacrifice: “Teacher’s Selflessness Can’t Be Unlimited” [7].

Positive viewpoints on governmental decisions of these problems are apparent in the following titles: “Government Returns to the Sphere of Education” [8], “Mayor Sits Down at the Desk”[19].

According to Van Dijk, one of the examples of inducement of the reader’s attention towards an acute problem, is the use of punctuation to achieve additional expression: “Teacher’s Drama”...» [10], “...Russian Profiteers Scrape up Their Fortune on ABC Books” [11], “While Putin Asks the Bureaucrats to Come up to the Blackboard...” [11]. It should be noted that use of dots in these sentences is not determined by grammar norms, but on the contrary, could be examined as a proposal for comprehension and ways to solve these problems. Continuing the theme of educational reforms, journalists use a mix of speech styles, articulating the problems of higher education finances, scholarships in particular.

Remodelling by the use of the slang words “to dupe”, with negative connotations, states the doubt of this innovation: “Half of Students Will Be Duped with Scholarships”[12].

The opposite opportunity for students sounds as: “...paid education includes different courses, higher education at universities and schools,

which differ from “people’s” education: easy to study, beautiful courses, packed in multimedia forms, which provide customers with pleasant feelings. But this is all according to the price-list” [6].

Neglected children

Another group of articles informed by the publications and titles, concerning neglected children, are expressed with the use of negative connotations: “Children in Trouble”, “The Army of Homeless Children” [14], “Homeless Gap” [15].

Social defence of childhood has been included in Russian social programs as well. It’s directed to support children, their rights and life level. This sphere attracts public opinion, especially by great amount of existing problems. The press shows its interest, but also demonstrates lack of governmental measures and data in this field. So, it becomes obvious that this problem is acute.

Legitimation of tolerance concerning a low life level of vulnerable social groups is articulated in following titles: “Happy Paupers” [16], “People Don’t Rebel, Living at Grass”[17]. The discriminative word “pauper” is widely used in the press language, breaking the usual boundaries of this meaning, and implicitly connecting it with jobless people or persons with low income and with all those whose profession is not represented as “prestigious”.

Conclusion

We undertook rather new approach in study of social policy, which goal was to analyse the representations of social policy in the press, particularly in its titles.

Such patterns as metaphors, epithets and phraseological expressions can be considered as research tools. The analysis shows the possibility of implicit and explicit influence towards the cognitive process by means of discriminating terms, or linguistic stereotypes. The press language differs from colloquial speech. It is concerned with a stereotyped vocabulary, used by journalists with the intention of not only reflecting on the social problems and social policy, but also to manipulate public opinion, which helps to form definite and wishful attitudes towards the social phenomenon of social policy.

Consonant words and phrases with negative connotations appeal to the reader's fantasy or experience, constructing definite attitudes towards teachers as the main social actors, legitimating his/her status, professional prestige and the quality of education as a whole.

The opposite point of view concerns the governmental role in the solving of these problems, that is, taking decisions in social policy (as education is one of its parts) and also perspectives of the educational system development, including changes in salaries and labour conditions.

As the result of our research we should generalise the following statements:

- The semantic space of social policy is possible to analyse with the help of discursive analysis of the press, which gives wide range of power interpretations of numerous agents of social transformations;
- The space of social policy can be defined as the space of social sphere, social groups interaction, social development;
- Social policy in Russia could be defined as the redistribution of resources among social groups, which are its actors at the same time;

- Decisions in the field of Russian social policy have a reactive character or fulfil the cosmetic function.

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