

POLITICAL DISCOURSE AS A PHENOMENON OF EMPIRICAL KNOWLEDGE: TELEVISION PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: The article studies theoretical and empirical characteristics of political discourse as a scientific category and media functioning tool. Main lines of research of the discourse as a type of political knowledge are presented. Comprehensive analysis of characteristics of the discourse as a type of political knowledge in respect to the activity of contemporary Russian mass media in the context of their influence on public opinion and formation of public political reality has been presented for the first time. We erected a proposition that discourse is a set of topical positions and exchange of opinions and their interpretations. It is shown that discourse functions in a certain time period and space context, in a certain social and audience environment and is an integral part of contemporary political process creating public space of the politics. Television is studied as a subject and object of public political activity. The notion of “politics” in a democratic society is described. Individual political knowledge is defined. It is theoretical and practical understanding of the set and state of contemporary relations in the field of politics with reference to historical experience of the country’s development and functions of political activity subjects, their hierarchy links in social management and regulation structure and ability to make conclusions and essential decisions concerning social phenomena on the basis of this knowledge. Essential characteristics of television are presented, and on their basis we erected a proposition that entertainment nature of television arouses the interest of mass audience to political knowledge received from the screen. Diversity of messages and their interpretations contribute to the development of discourses as methods of expressing political knowledge and political actors’ reactions to them. The role of television journalism in the development of political culture is shown. Understanding the essence and tasks of social and political activity on the whole, ability to evaluate emerging situations correctly, consequent and adequate actions with respect to the circumstances form political knowledge of the journalists. Satisfying these professional criteria, they accumulate work experience, and information distribution and persuasion methods make journalistic influence on public opinion more effective.

Keywords: Political discourse, political knowledge, political culture, TV journalism, political media culture, political aggression.

INTRODUCTION

Study of discourse as a political category is relatively new for modern science and requires more accurate definition, specification and substantiation. Intentional study of development factors and characteristics of political discourse as a phenomenon is needed in order to discover and explain its functioning through theoretical concepts, analysis of journalistic creative activity and mass media practical activity. In order to fuller understand the discourse as a political category it is reasonable to turn to the history of research and show its functioning in modern mass media. In classical

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philosophy discursive (logical) thinking was contrasted with intuitive thinking. Discursive thinking as development of consistent judgements was studied by famous thinkers of their days: Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Rene Descartes, Benedict de Spinoza, G.W. Leibniz, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Christian von Wolff, F.H. Jacobi, I. Kant, G.W. F. Hegel, etc.

The term “discourse” comes from Latin “discere” which means “wander”. Such origin is explained by the fact that for a long time discourse had been a strictly logical notion meaning that connection and truth were found between two discreet steps. Russian discourse researcher O.L. Mikhaleva notes that the Latin word was the seme of action and originated from the word “running” (in different directions), which is similar to “wandering”, or uncertain, random movement. It also designates special bidirectional attack of an army meant to isolate the parts of enemy’s army from one another. The discourse was understood as running back and forth, and this irregular movement was associated with human thinking (Mikhaleva, 2009). According to Latin dictionary, “discursus” means “reasoning” or “speech” (Neretina, 1998) and is a part of speech seme.

METHODOLOGY

Study of political discourse as a phenomenon of empirical knowledge cannot be conducted without a definite scientific methodological basis. This research is based on such general scientific research methods as:

1. Historical method allowing to analyse the understanding of the studied phenomenon in different historical periods. In this study in particular, it is noted that political discourse functions in a certain time period and space context, in a certain social and audience environment. Therefore, it is necessary to turn to historical context.
2. Generalisation method as a process of defining general trends through particular ones.
3. Analysis method as a process of establishing formal and logical links between the elements of the studied objects. In particular, the phenomenon of political discourse is considered together with the notion of political media culture.

Comprehensive use of the above-mentioned methods when conducting this research appears most preferable, as it will allow to receive consistent results and specify the prospects of further studies in this scientific field.

This work continues the study of phenomenology of political discourse in public space the results of which were published in leading Russian scientific journals and approved at a number of international conferences in Russia.

RESULTS

Television – subject and object of political activity

Contemporary political organisation of the Russian society based on the principles of ideological pluralism stimulates the interest and active participation of the citizens in political life. In mass media political interest of the citizens is related to their interest in political television programmes. This is confirmed by high ratings of political programmes and active political discussions in traditional mass media and on the Internet. “Politics and political figures on TV are usually a differentiated, versatile, sharp, prompt and topical show. That is why the audience is deeply politicised compared to the Soviet times. People of different ages discuss the developments in State Duma, the speeches of the Russian President, know about the conflicts in Ukraine and Sochi, wait for top level meetings of the presidents of Russia and the USA” (Klyuev and Gromova, 2016). What channels are the main providers of political knowledge today? Political knowledge is mostly spread via television among the most important characteristics of which is spectacularity. The nature of television broadcast includes comprehensive influence on viewers: bright picture fascinates and attracts attention, audio sequence immerses them into television reality, diversity of scenes, pace and rhythm of audiovisual narrative hold attention of the audience. As a rule, television act is presented as a theatrical performance, it is staged and forms a particular audiovisual art environment. This art is original, imaginative and thus interesting. Spectacular nature of TV stirs the interest of mass audience to political knowledge. Diversity of messages and their interpretations contribute to the development of discourses as methods of expressing political knowledge and reactions to them.

An important characteristic of television is its mass nature. Television is of mass nature not only due to the extent it has spread, but also due to the fact that broadcasted messages are understandable for the audience. TV programme appeals both to individual viewers and mass audience. The screen fascinates because this mass nature is contrasted with elitism. Political information conveyed via TV screen becomes available for general public. Due to mass nature of TV influence, political discourse no longer remains elitist and becomes understandable and widely discussed. Activation of political discourse is directly related to the everywhere-ness of television with the help of which viewers enter such places and areas of life they would have never visited. Television overcomes social, demographic, space and time distances between citizens and leaders as key subjects of the politics.

Politics and political laws themselves according to which state systems and political regimes function differ from the state of personal political choice. In political activity the choice of the position is integrated into the areas of life indirectly connected to ideological orientation of a person. This phenomenon was

reflected in mass media. “Taking into consideration the realities of our days, we can say, that mass media have functions of propaganda” (Nikonov and Achkasova and Labush and Baichik and Puiy, 2016). V.V. Tulupov is also sure that information and psychological counteraction of mass media uses propaganda methods (Tulupov, 2015). This is confirmed by the fact that the issues of domestic politics in the field of economics (inflation, investments and bank crediting, rate of industrial and agricultural production), questions of ethical, legal and moral state of the society and people are viewed through the lens of political comprehension. These issues are indirectly connected to the political choice of a person concerning their reaction to the actions of particular political figures. And although eliminating the contradictions in the abovementioned fields may take decades, each mass media creates its own attitude of topical issues of domestic politics for its audience. As a result of psychological effect, a person may start to think that power discourse is prior to individual participation in the solution of social problems. Thus mass media practically free the audience from the responsibility for personal participation in socio-political life. In a number of cases social and economic issues of a particular person and particular social groups are intentionally turned by journalists into political ones in order to gain necessary results from the provoked social act or inaction (which is mainly true for opposition mass media). Due to financial or other reasons, mass media can become a tool of certain political power. In this case the principle of objectivity of journalistic activity is damaged.

TV journalism in the development of political media culture

According to the definition of V.I. Kuzin, political journalism “serves to help man and the whole society to create a truly democratic state and civil society in which conscious political activity is fully cultivated, the level of political consciousness and culture is increased and a man is reborn politically, morally and psychologically” (Kuzin, 2004). Such understanding of the purpose of political journalism identifies the need to transmit rational political knowledge through mass media and form political culture of the society based on the principle of respectful interaction between the parties of the political process.

Political journalism is a special area of reporter’s, commentator’s, editor’s and expert’s work. It satisfies the society’s need for political problematics in mass media, but not with the help of propaganda means. It spotlights existing negative phenomena and “even outlines certain methods of overcoming them by generalising political practice and finding unexpected similarities” (Sidorov, 2004). Understanding the essence and tasks of social and political activity on the whole, ability to evaluate emerging situations correctly, consequent and adequate actions with respect to the circumstances form political knowledge of the journalists. Political media culture as

a part of general culture of the participants of the political process is formed through knowledge and understanding of political activity development laws and effects. Political media culture presupposes that a person has political information but it does not define the whole amount of their political knowledge, as the formation of political culture continuum is influenced by individual upbringing, culture level, education and intellectuality. In this sense with respect to political reality, one cannot but agree that there may be great distance between knowledge and its understanding.

V.M. Berezin believes that political culture of a journalist consists of their knowledge, morality, views and actions with reference to basic guidelines and values: "Political culture is ability to think on the basis of knowledge, ability to evaluate the morality of people's behaviour and actions of social groups. <...> Speaking of political culture, we also presuppose the ability (or inability) to transfer knowledge, views into action and political participation, that is ability and will to act on the basis of knowledge, values, guidelines" (Berezin, 2002). V.A. Sidorov upholds the same position. He understands political culture of a journalist as quality integral characteristic of historically certain life activity of an author: topical cognition of political system, emotional attitude to it, potential behavior in the field of their profession (Sidorov, 2010). Historically formed calling of Russian journalism for serving as political briefing puts great responsibility on mass media, and therefore a topical question arises: can the audience be fully satisfied with political knowledge they receive through modern mass media? We would like to say yes, however we cannot do that because contemporary Russian journalists working in political space are usually only intuitive in their political literacy. The result of this psychological effect is not objective and critical view on political reality, but obvious commitment which often turns into emotional and sometimes even physical aggression and is realized in the language of hostility concerning other political views.

A.I. Yuriev, professor of St Petersburg State University, made a critical remark on the quality of political information in mass media. He believes that "our political leaders themselves are not willing to formulate their views clearly and precisely, because they stake on emotional, sensory, subconscious influence on the electorate" (Yuriev, 2006). The researcher's conclusions suggest that emotional publications about political parties and activity of subjects and authority institutions lacking deep analysis can be explained by poor political media culture. Journalists either know little about the political process or simplify political topics for the society too much. Thus mass media follow the needs of the audience which wants to receive prepared but much simplified information. In this sense the press and the audience understand each other, but this understanding is not usually based on true knowledge (Kravtsov, 2009).

At the beginning of the 21st century the transformation of the structure of Russian mass media, pluralism of ideological concepts resulted in the appearance of new subjects of communication: bloggers and columnists. Such “renaissance” of publicity and considerable influence of the Internet on the society lead to the fact that the main problem now is oversupply and oversaturation of information. Its mass chaotic production and distribution became global and often contradicts national interests of Russia. It becomes difficult for the audience to tell the fact from the fiction, to single out comprehensive and truthful messages among the information noise. Thus the risk of over-politicisation of mass media – turning political information into a show, which is, above all, true for audiovisual mass media. Such transformation is seriously influenced by the fact that media figures, such as hosts of entertainment, music and popular-science programmes, turn to political broadcasting.

The format of political programmes is also changing. Political chat shows become more and more popular on TV and radio. Presenters have a wide range of means for correcting public opinion. They can create different possibilities for the participants to express their positions. They have the right of on-air “veto” (deny a person out of favour the right to speak), turn social or cultural conversation into political one (or vice versa) making an artificial link between them. They provoke intolerant behaviour of a participant, which may lead to aggression and even the application of physical force on-air, etc. This by no means improves the level of political culture in the society. The audience now considers such programmes as entertainment, and they become “sensationalist” and turn into yellow journalism. This also strikes a huge blow at real politics, which is presented highly negatively on screen.

DISCUSSION

In the middle of the 20th century the scientific community began to discuss discourse in its contemporary meaning and tried to conduct comprehensive analysis of this category. French researcher Emile Benveniste was one of the first to study it and he gave the term “discourse”, which at first designated a text or speech, its terminological meaning – “speech assigned by the speaker” (Benveniste, 2009); in other words, Benveniste made the most precise definition that discourse, unlike speech in general, is subjective. Benveniste’s work on the differentiation of discourse and text was continued by such French researchers as Patrick Charaudeau, Michel Pecheux, Patrick Seriot, etc. Dutch scientist T.A. Van Dijk supported and expanded their position.

In Russia the notion of “discourse” came into common use among scientists in 1970s and at first was used as a purely linguistic term. Discourse was understood as text or speech, no attention was paid to oral and written channels of discourse

transmission. In the course of time lines of discourse research significantly changed and became more and more interdisciplinary. As a result of its use it was found that “discourse” and “text” are highly differentiated notions, since their essential characteristics are different. A.E. Kibrik was one of the first Russian researchers who noted that discourse is “a communicative situation including the consciousness of communicators (communication partners)” (Kibrik and Nariniani 1987). V.I. Karasik defines discourse as “text immersed into the communication situation” (Karasik, 2000), that is modernised text, its form which functions only in the communication process. Speaking metaphorically, as N.D. Arutyunova did, discourse is “speech immersed into life” (Arutyunova, 1990). Such approaches allow to make a conclusion that at the end of the 20th century Russian scientists no longer considered discourse as an abstract text or speech act not connected to life. They began to consider intellectual operations in the mind of speakers a part of discourse process.

Original approaches to the study of discourse are presented in the works of O.F. Rusakova and A.E. Spassky. They understand discourse as an agent of communication (carrier and retransmitter of meanings, values, ideas, images, opinions, interpretations, other mental and virtual formations); an authoritative resource (through which social institutions and individuals self-represent, legitimate, construct and promote different images of reality, perform positioning in sociocultural and political space); emotional supply of mass culture and politics (involves sensory and irrational components of the consciousness, has hidden influence on the subconsciousness, which creates favourable conditions for the implementation of manipulative strategies); phenomenon of social life (Rusakova and Spassky, 2006).

On the basis of the studied works of her predecessors, T.N. Kamenskaya identified two principal approaches to the analysis of “discourse” and “text” categories: 1) text is presented as a static communicative unit and discourse as dynamic one; 2) text is defined as a part of discourse (Kamenskaya, 2010). Such differentiation is close to the position of T.A. Van Dijk who claimed that there are micro and macrolevels of the approach to notion definition. At the microlevel, discourse is a verbal expression of communicative act – written or oral result interpreted by recipients. Macrolevel is characterised by the fact that discourse is considered not only as a verbal result of communication, but also as a set of accompanying factors (Dijk, 2013). Therefore, discourse is a set of topical positions and exchange of opinions interpreting them. Discourse functions in a certain time period and space context, in a certain social and audience environment.

Of course, discourse and social area are closely connected. According to Jurgen Habermas, social area is created in free discussion and is formed within free social discussions at different social grounds. Habermas considers social area as an

intermediary system of communication between formally organised and informal face-to-face discussions both on top and in the very bottom of the political system (Habermas, 2006). S.S. Bodrunova and S.N. Bolshakov agree with that. They are confident that the development of discourse approach, which is structural-functional approach in its essence), puts communication in the middle of social area. That said, discourse approach is represented in the category of communicative concept of politics. According to the above-mentioned researchers, J. Habermas “institutionalises communication and social area as a space of application of communicative action, making communication one of the structural parts of the political system (Bodrunova and Bolshakov, 2013).

Implementation of politics is related to the development of the state as a mechanism of supporting general order in the society. Modern description of the “politics” category is much wider, but traditionally it is mostly associated with state activity meaning “the science of tasks and goals of the state and available or necessary measures for that” (Gubsky, 2006). V.A. Sidorov notes that politics is “participating in the activities of the state, governing the state <...>; taking part in the development and adoption of political decisions; activities of social communities aimed at satisfaction of one’s own interests with the help of the authorities; fight for power and its implementation; relationships between social groups, classes, states, peoples with respect to power; volitional distribution of material and spiritual values; concentrated expression of economic basis of the society; organisation of social life so as to secure order and safety of the citizens” (Sidorov, 2004). In a democratic society politics means multidirectional and free (within the existing legislation) public and social activity of individuals and social groups aimed at organisation and regulation of public relations.

In order to adequately understand the political process, members of the society need comprehensive information giving them knowledge. Political knowledge of an individual is theoretical and practical understanding of the set and state of contemporary relations in the field of politics with reference to historical experience of the country’s development and functions of political activity subjects, their hierarchy links in social management and regulation structure and ability to make conclusions and essential decisions concerning social phenomena on the basis of this knowledge. According to the opinion of T.A. Van Dijk, “our knowledge and attitude to politicians, parties and presidents are acquired, changed or supported to a considerable degree <...> within the processes of socialisation, education, perception of mass media information and informal conversations (Dijk, 2013). V.V. Begun and V.A. Salimovsky offer an interesting point of view. According to their opinion, “politics is mainly that area of life into which mass media texts are “immersed” (Begun and Salimovsky, 2009). And one can quite agree with them,

since politics influences most areas of social activity of a person and, as a result, the life of the society on the whole. In 1940-1970s communicative concept of public politics was suggested by H. Arendt and K. Deutsch independently. They described politics as: 1) non-violent communication providing joint activity of citizens enjoying equal rights; 2) concordance of public interest and individual problems; 3) political system functioning in the form of information and communication exchange (Resnyanskaya, 2007).

CONCLUSION

As for Russian mass media, including television, political discourse may be considered as a ground for social discussions, opinions, initiatives implemented in public space through representatives of different social groups. At the same time, attitudes expressed in social area have characteristics of free exchange of socially important topical messages. Polyphony of these messages, their strongly pronounced personification and crisscross commenting create, on the one hand, united political agenda for society and, on the other hand, form various openly shared in public social reactions to civic stands of people as independent subjects of social process. Democratisation of social life makes this process stable: because of television, receiving empirical knowledge about politics through audiovisual channel becomes a habit for the audience. Its popularity among the audience and significant influence on public opinion create priority - most favourable treatment – for TV journalism in quick and topical coverage of political phenomena and events: it is accompanied by attitude, evaluation, comment. This is the television effect of political discourse as a phenomenon of empirical knowledge. Political discourse developing on TV screen, depending on the participants, includes direct or indirect screen discussion of topical issues, usually in sensational manner: discussions are short, changeable, strained and aggressive. It is not surprising that high social aggression shown on the screen is criticised, as there is a threat of transfer of political aggression as a kind of social violence from virtual television environment into real life.

Study of political discourse as a phenomenon of empirical knowledge of the society is not exhaustive and requires further theoretical and practical development, purposeful research within the science of journalism, as without it the development of the system of political science turning to the content, structure and functioning of mass media is not complete. Theory and practice of discoursology offers new opportunities for research in the field of mass media and especially concerning its television content the study of which will require deeper analysis of practical activity of journalists and editorial boards taking into account swift changes in the field of mass communication and social development on the whole.

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