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Modelling the Image of the Country and the Image of a Political Leader in the American Media Discourse

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Abstract. The purpose of this article is to consider the linguistic features of the representation of a number of states and their heads in the American media discourse and to identify the influence of the language of the media and the political orientation of the publication on the construction of the image of the state and its leader. The analysis of publications in the journal “Foreign Affairs” devoted to such countries as Brazil, the Philippines, Hungary and their heads of state is carried out. American journalists attribute the political regime of these countries to autocracies, and the leaders to populists. In this regard, the relevance of the study is due not only to the wide interest in the problem of constructing the image of the state and the image of a political leader from a wide range of specialists, including political scientists, sociologists, linguists, psychologists, etc., but also to the influence of media texts on the formation and transformation of the image in the mind of the addressee. The subject of the study is the lexical and stylistic means of representing the images of the above-mentioned countries and their heads of state in the media text. The object of the study is the analytical articles of the journal “Foreign Affairs”, which reflect the socio-political realities. In this study, the methods of stylistic analysis, semantic analysis, contextual analysis of political media texts, as well as a descriptive method, including the generalization and interpretation of the information received, were used. The conclusion is made about the formation of the image of the country and its leader based on the reception of contrast, the wide inclusion of pejorative semantics, intertextuality techniques, lexical means of various stylistic tonality in the text, and the implementation by the authors of media texts of various strategies in imposing a certain image of the country and its leader on the addressee.

Keywords: media discourse, the image of the country, the image of a politician, media stylistics, political linguistics, international relations

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Моделирование имиджа страны и образа политического деятеля в американском медиадискурсе

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Аннотация. Цель статьи состоит в рассмотрении лингвистических особенностей репрезентации ряда стран и их глав в американском медиадискурсе и выявлении влияния языка СМИ и политической направленности издания на конструирование имиджа государства и его лидера. Проводится анализ публикаций в журнале *Foreign Affairs*, посвященных таким странам, как Бразилия, Филиппины, Венгрия и их главам государств. Американские журналисты относят политический режим данных стран к автократиям, а лидеров — к популистам. В связи с этим актуальность исследования обусловлена не только широким интересом к проблеме конструирования имиджа государства и образа политического лидера со стороны широкого круга специалистов, включая политологов, социологов, лингвистов, психологов и др., но и влиянием медиатекстов на формирование и трансформацию образа в сознании адресата. Предметом исследования послужили лексико-стилистические средства репрезентации образов вышеназванных стран и их глав в медиатексте. Объектом исследования являются аналитические статьи издания “*Foreign Affairs*”, в которых нашли отражение общественно-политические реалии. В настоящем исследовании были использованы методы контент-анализа, стилистического, семантического анализа, контекстуального анализа политических медиатекстов, а также описательный метод, включающий в себя обобщение и интерпретацию полученной информации. Сделан вывод о построении образа страны и ее лидера на основе приема контраста, широком включении в текст лексики пейоративной семантики, приемов интертекстуальности, лексических средств различной стилистической тональности и реализации авторами медиатекстов различных стратегий в навязывании адресату определенного образа страны и ее руководителя.

Ключевые слова: номинация, оценка, метафора, ассоциация, политическая модализация

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Introduction

The media has always been an important way of organizing and imparting information in society and in our time has become a core component of social reality. Mass media wield pervasive power and are able to involve citizens in the political process. The content of the media to some extent determines and shapes the life of the consumer of information. This factor plays an essential role in the process of forming public opinion and managing social mechanisms, which is essential for politics.

As a result of the intense activity of mass media, language becomes an instrument of struggle for political influence, and media text becomes a form of its implementation. In our understanding, a media text we will follow the explanation introduced by L.V. Minaeva who determines the media text as a creolized polycode text that belongs to a certain stable media source and is transmitted through mass communication channels [1].

A media political sub-discourse is a set of political texts processed by a journalist in one way or another. It includes primary texts, such as parliamentary sessions and debates, the President's inaugural speech, the President's Address to the Federal Assembly, as well as secondary texts, in which "primary" information is used, systematized and reduced, processed and formalized in a special way. Thus, the media text is a journalistic interpretation of the source text. The repetition of topics and the range of problems in media publications from issue to issue contributes to increasing the importance of the stated topics in the minds of readers, which allows a media outlet to manage public opinion and direct it in the required direction. The impact of the media lies in the scope of evaluation criteria formation and decision-making.

While creating a media text, a journalist presents the material through the prism of his or her experience, knowledge and value system, and reproduces reality through his or her picture of the world. In addition, the author is influenced by the corporate ethics of the media outlet, its socio-political orientation and the political preferences of the owner. It is also important for a journalist to constantly maintain the interest of the reader or viewer, so the information can be transformed and presented in a form that is convenient for the mass audience to perceive [1].

Thus, a media outlet forms one or another portrait of a representative of the political world or a view on a topical problem, creating a certain media image. In the scientific literature, the term "media image" refers to a set of emotional and rational representations based on information received from the media, or a special image of reality presented to a mass audience by the media industry [1].

In any case, a media image is a reflection of the real world in the mind of a journalist, transmitted by means of media communication in the form of a media text in all its complexity, which is perceived and evaluated by the addressee depending on his or her values. A media image can have an expressive effect on the feelings and mind of the addressee, forming in the mind a picture of the world, which often has little in common with reality. In other words, the media image is formed as a result of the interaction of the value systems of the addresser (journalist) and the addressee (reader) of the message. With the help of a diverse palette of linguistic means, visual and expressive devices of language, memorable media images of politicians are created.

It is worth noting the interest in studying the formation of the image of the country in the scientific literature among a wide range of specialists in the field of international relations, political science, sociology, as well as linguistics and psychology. There are various studies devoted to modelling the image of the country. This process is viewed

through the prism of world-scale sporting events and their impact on the recognition of the region [2–3], the importance of diplomatic institutions in the formation and improvement of a favorable image of the country [4–5], the creation of a positive tourist image and a sustainable national brand [6], the influence of political conflicts on the image of the country and attractiveness to visit [7]. The issue of the formation and replication of countries images by the mass media is considered in the studies of G.V. Bestolkova [8], O.V. Ustinova [9], I.V. Sidorskaya [10], M.R. Zheltukhina [11], I.S. Palitai [12], L.E. Ostapova [13], and others.

The purpose of our research is to analyse the media text to determine the intention of a journalist who creates a particular media image of a country and its head, as well as to identify the mechanism for creating a media image of a given content applying linguistic means in order to influence the addressee's subconscious.

Methodological Framework

In our work we will study lexical and stylistic features of media texts, in particular, linguistic means of creating the image of countries and political leaders, based on the material of the USA journal on foreign policy and international relations “Foreign Affairs”. We will observe the dependence of the media image on the political situation and the balance of power on the international arena. We will analyze linguistic tools for the formation of the evaluative media image of politicians, determine the role of the media in the process of forming and transforming the image of countries and political leaders.

The choice of the source is determined by the high authority of this media outlet in the coverage of global challenges of our time and the established publishing tradition of the journal that was founded in 1922. The research material is represented by political articles published in the journal in 2019–2020, dedicated to the first persons of countries such as Brazil, the Philippines, and Hungary. According to the journal, these states belong to autocracies, and the heads belong to populist leaders.

The journal “Foreign Affairs” highlights that on the world stage the heads of these countries practice today a tough, forceful policy and a strong centralized power of one person, i.e. autocracy. Power leaders of the old school, they do everything to seize and hold power in their hands. Everyone had to make their way from obscurity to power or metaphorically to the throne (*fight the way from obscurity to the throne*), after which their political programme took an authoritarian course [14]. The resurgent nationalism in these countries and the growing discontent of citizens about economic inequality are cited as global factors that contributed to the rise of these leaders [15].

We should note that the assessment of objectivity / non-objectivity and lawfulness / unlawfulness of the published materials was out of scope of our research.

Speaking about the structure and composition of the analytical materials studied by us, it is worth noting that the authors of the articles represent the described state using a contrast technique, emphasizing the contradictory nature

of the standard of living. Often, the authors, describing the path of the future leader's ascent to power, tell about his difficult youth years, certain hardships that fell to his lot, in that way presenting a kind of overcoming path. Further, the authors describe the problematic phenomena in society that the policy of a particular leader has led to. And in conclusion, the role of the United States as a superpower capable of influencing the state of affairs in the country is always indicated and specific proposals or steps are indicated to "improve" the situation or prevent its aggravation.

The methods of stylistic analysis, semantic analysis, contextual analysis of political media texts, and descriptive method were chosen as research methods.

Results and Discussion

Lexico-stylistic image of Brazil and its President

The first country whose image we would like to present is Brazil and its 38th President Jair Bolsonaro. In the following passage, the author of the media text uses the antithesis and hyperbole, presenting contrasting features of one of the leading states of the South American continent.

Brazil has a face that it tends to present to the world: a country of glittering beaches and hillside favelas, of Oscar Niemeyer's delightful churches and museums, of João Gilberto crooning "The Girl from Ipanema." This is the Brazil of Rio de Janeiro, which is also, not coincidentally, the city that hosts global events, such as the Olympics, and that serves as a base for most foreign correspondents. This Brazil is troubled but romantic, a racial mosaic, violent but impossible to resist. It is a postcard, a nightmare, a dream [15].

Inevitably, a country of 210 million people has many other faces, from the riverside villages of the Amazon to the Blade Runner-style skyscrapers of São Paulo and the old gaucho country of the far south. But the Brazil perhaps least known to outsiders is what some Brazilians call — sometimes fondly, sometimes with an eye roll — the interiorzão, which translates literally as "the big interior" [15].

On the one hand, Brazil is presented as a country of magnificent beaches, amazing beauty of churches and museums, the venue of the Olympic Games and major international events, and on the other hand, it is a long-suffering country with a high level of cruelty and crime, spontaneously arisen favelas on the hillsides, a diverse racial mosaic, it's a postcard, a nightmare, a dream, like the author calls it hyperbolically. The effect of the impact on the reader is achieved through the use of vivid epithets, like *glittering, delightful, troubled, romantic, a racial mosaic, violent but impossible to resist*, that makes the image memorable and multifaceted and represents the country from different sides. The description also uses an allusion to the 1981 film "Blade Runner" — *the Blade Runner-style skyscrapers of São Paulo* — i.e. futuristic skyscrapers of the technological future.

Demonstrating the image of the country, the author actively resorts to foreign language inclusions and realias: *favelas* — *shums located on the slopes of the mountains in the cities of Brazil*, *the old gaucho* — *South American cowboys*, *the interiorzão* —

as the author explains, the “big interior”, which is not defined on the map, but usually refers to the belt of the earth located around the geographical center of the country, bossa nova — a genre of Brazilian popular music that is a synthesis of local folklore and jazz, sertanejo — a musical style that originated in rural Brazil in the 1920s. All these foreign expressions emphasize national and cultural identity of the country, help to create a special unique image of the “other”, and add expressiveness.

The creation of the media image of the President of Brazil is also based on the reception of contrast: on the one hand, he failed to achieve tangible positive results in the development of the country, and on the other, he enjoys the support of voters: *But a deeper look suggests that support for Bolsonaro remains surprisingly resilient, even if he is in many ways utterly failing to deliver positive results for either his base or the country as a whole* [15].

The journal characterizes the political leader of Brazil with the help of nominal and verbal phrases: *Trump of the tropics* and *Culture warrior untamed*. The use of the precedent name of the 45th US President Donald Trump is mentioned in the text not to designate the leader of the country, but, according to D.B. Gudkov, as a kind of cultural sign, a symbol of certain qualities and properties [16]. This technique expresses the axiological attitude of the author of the article, creates the effect of expressiveness and projects the qualities of the American president on the political leader of Brazil. Jair Bolsonaro, by analogy with Donald Trump, is characterized as an ultra-right nationalist, a fighter against fake news and political rivals, a man exerting influence on the Supreme Court and married for the third time to a woman much younger than him [15].

International media coverage tends to portray Bolsonaro as “the Trump of the Tropics”, a “far-right” nationalist who is even more unrefined, more vulgar, and more of a threat to the established world order than the man in the White House [15].

The repetition of the comparative adverb *more* strengthens the complex of evaluative characteristics, makes the image of the president weightier, albeit at the expense of pejorative lexemes.

The author of the article contrasts the achievements of D. Trump and J. Bolsonaro: *It’s like Trump, but without the good economy* [15], at the same time emphasizing the fact that the president of Brazil largely took an example from his American counterpart, both in the style of governing the country and in behavior.

The use of epithets in the following examples expresses both the subjective attitude of the author of the article, and through the use of intertextuality appeals to an authoritative opinion:

Bolsonaro’s subversive style.

One of his commanding officers described him as “lacking logic, rationality, and balance.”

Ernesto Geisel, a general and former president under the military dictatorship, singled out Bolsonaro in a 1993 interview as “a bad soldier” and “an abnormal case.” [15].

These evaluative judgments characterize the behavioral reactions of the politician and the style of decision-making.

Harsh statements against the LGBT-community and the conservative views of Jair Bolsonaro cause the use of a metaphorical expression *Culture warrior untamed*. *Bolsonaro's presidency would always be more about the culture wars — about the need for “boys to wear blue and girls to wear pink,” in the words of his women's affairs minister, Damares Alves — than about pro-market reforms or even the fight against corruption* [15]. The author of the article refers to the technique of intertextuality, including in the text the opinion of a person from Bolsonaro's team, which makes his conclusion more evidential and authentic.

The actions of Jair Bolsonaro in the field of domestic policy are evaluated in the “Foreign Affairs” journal positively in a number of areas, but not to a significant extent: *Brazil has seen some progress under Bolsonaro: violent crime is down (although the causes are disputed), and the government has passed some pro-market reforms and cut red tape for small-business owners. But overall, the country seems terribly stuck. It is confronting the real possibility of a second consecutive “lost decade” of economic stagnation, political dysfunction, and diminished ambition* [15].

Despite the indication of a certain positive effect of domestic political reforms, the abundance of lexemes with pejorative semantics, like *terribly stuck*, *lost decade*, *stagnation*, *dysfunction*, *diminished* strengthens the image of a country with a large number of problems in the spheres of economy and politics and to some extent creates the impression of hopelessness from the existing situation. Although the author softens the categorical judgment at the expense of the lexeme *seem*, he manages to impose an image of a dead end situation.

The media image of the Brazilian president is also presented through a description of his reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the author of the article notes, the new virus has revealed the shortcomings of the current generation of populist leaders from both the ideological left and the ideological right. Although Brazil has its own positive experience in the fight against a number of diseases caused by HIV and Zika virus, in the fight against coronavirus, the country took an example from the United States: *Brazil has a history of bold, creative public health responses to diseases such as AIDS and Zika. But Bolsonaro, again taking cues from Washington, dismissed COVID-19 as “a little flu,” frequently refused to wear a mask in public, and championed chloroquine as a miracle cure* [15]. The refusal to take seriously the new virus and its consequences led to an outbreak of morbidity in the country and a large number of deaths. Shirking responsibility, inaction and a certain amount of hopelessness are presented in the following remark; however, the emphasis of J. Bolsonaro on his name Messiah, — the personification with the divine messenger, speaks of his high status and desire for omnipotence: *“What do you want me to do? My name is Messiah, but I can't make miracles.” Even when he tested positive for the virus himself in July, his initial reaction amounted to a shrug* [15].

Our material showed that Brazil is represented in the journal “Foreign Affairs” as a country of contrasts, with its own specific national flavor, and its leader is an energetic and active supporter of reforms with an emphasis on preserving the national and cultural identity of his country, albeit using methods that cannot be called diplomatic and liberal.

Lexico-stylistic image of the Philippines and the President of the country

Another populist leader, according to the “Foreign Affairs” journal, was the president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, who served as the head of state from 2016 to 2022. The use of lexical combinations, such as *the vigilante president* and *Duterte’s brutal populism* creates the image of a bold and determined politician.

The author of the article cites an episode from the school years of the future politician when Duterte shot his classmate because of the name-calling in his address about a provincial accent. As a method of intertextuality, the words of Duterte from his campaign speech are given: “*I waited for him. I told myself, I’ll teach him a lesson. The truth is, I am used to shooting people*” [14].

The emphasis on this episode is used to intimidate opponents and demonstrate intransigence to injustice. At the same time, the image is created not of an aggressor, but of a defender of his honor:

It was a typical Duterte story, with Duterte cast not as the aggressor but as the aggrieved, resorting to a gun to defend his honor [14].

By means of contrast the author highlights such different qualities of the president as boasting and self-criticism and a tendency to self-deprecating. Expressive epithets, such as *crass*, *hyperbolic*, *transgressive* give assessment to the president’s actions and emphasize his sharp and impulsive character. In addition to the seme of behavior, the adjective *crass* contains the seme of mental abilities — *very stupid and showing no sympathy or understanding* [17], i.e. very stupid and showing neither sympathy nor understanding. Thus, the nature of the character is assessed by the author of the article quite negatively.

As for political activity, the author ironically characterizes the president as *a consummate power broker* and *a masterful political tactician* and further exposing his actions with the following verbal units: *His rambling rants against elites, drug users, and criminals feed on popular frustrations with the country’s broken justice system and feckless ruling class* [14]. *He had lashed out against “imperial Manila” and the “imperial” United States, articulating festering resentments against national and global elites* [14]. The lexeme *festering*, — purulent, bears a strong expressive tone, emphasizing the explosive nature of the president and the accumulation of problems in the country of various kinds.

The author of the media text compares the twenty-two-year term of R. Duterte’s tenure as mayor of Davao with the *controlling patriarch*: *He imposed a curfew on minors, banned smoking in most public places, restricted liquor sales, and*

cracked down on traffic violators and petty offenders [14]. The presented verbal units have the seme of limitation and characterize the politician as a supporter of harsh measures and pressure. At the same time, the author notes a number of social reforms: *He also beefed up social welfare programs, set up one of the most successful 911 emergency call lines in the country, provided services for abused women, and built clinics for the needy* [14]. The verbal units *beefed up, set up, provided, built* are contextual synonyms, they have the seme of creation and characterize the politician as a supporter of transformations.

The author applies to the phrases with strongly-marked pejorative sense, such as *to control, to bombard, to decimate, to defeat, to intimidate into docility* in the description of Congress, the Supreme Court, the liberal opposition, the press, the Catholic clergy and human rights defenders. These verbal phrases have the seme of “impact with the use of force” in their meaning and express the idea of an illiberal policy. The author of the media text implements evaluative, accusatory and discrediting functions when creating an image of a politician [11].

R. Duterte is known for his fight against drug trafficking, thanks to which he is called *Punisher of Criminals* and *Avenger of Filipinos' Wounded Pride* for his relations with the imperialist elites in Manila, the leadership of the United States, China and Russia.

The analysis of the media text showed that the author focuses more on the negative characteristics of the policy of the former President of the Philippines, creates an image of the head of state based on contrasting features, imposes on the addressees the idea of a democracy that has reached a dead end — *gridlocked democracy*.

Lexico-stylistic image of Hungary and its Prime Minister

In continuation of the series of articles on modern autocracy, the journal “Foreign Affairs” refers to the personality of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban. The headline of the article “*The Transformer. Orban's Evolution and Hungary's Demise*” is created on the basis of antithesis. The author ironizes, metaphorically calling the politician a transformer, which implies significant changes in something, usually with a positive sign; however, the author of the article sees the collapse of the country as a result of these transformations — its *demise*.

As a testimony, the author cites the political decisions of the Prime Minister over the past decade: *Orban has systematically dismantled the country's democratic institutions, undermined the rule of law, eliminated constitutional checks and balances, hobbled independent media, and built a kleptocratic system that rewards cronies while sidelining critics* [18]. The lexical units *dismantle, undermine, eliminate, hobble, sideline* have got a number of common semantic components that can be designated as bringing to an end, lowering the status and weakening the effectiveness, creating obstacles and difficulties. The general pejorative meaning of verbal units allows the author to create an image of a supporter of undemocratic actions.

In the characterization of political and social institutions we can notice the approach of “containment”. The following lexemes prove that: *He chipped away at its authority (about the court); stripped the Constitutional Court of the ability to review laws concerning state finances; had long dreamed of hobbling the publicly funded media networks; the public networks are more tightly supervised today; a further erosion of press freedom, etc.* [18]. The author forms an idea of the limitation of the powers of the leading democratic entities, the shift of politics towards *crude autocracy and an autocratic right-wing populism*.

Describing the path of V. Orban’s ascent to power, — a young liberal, the author of the media text emphasizes his humble origin and rather modest living conditions: *cramped house, a dilapidated house at the end of the street, the house had no running water* [18]. At the same time, the future politician was *a bright student*, which allowed him to get a good education. By means of intertextuality the article cites the words of V. Orban from his interview that he is “*Unbelievably bad child. Badly misbehaved, cheeky, violent. Not at all likeable*” [18]. References to the past and recollection of the childhood and not wealthy life is a quite common device in politics. As a rule, the qualities peculiar to most people are emphasized. The purpose of such device is to show similarities of a politician with ordinary people and to reduce the distance between the power and the people. Such method becomes especially relevant and effective before the elections.

Direct quoting of one of the Hungarian politicians Balint Magyar, who called the country under the leadership of V. Orban “*a post-communist mafia state*”, expresses the negative attitude of the addresser to the described person and contributes to the consolidation of a negative idea among the target audience. The author’s words about the corruption of the system of concluding state contracts perform an accusatory function: *Under his watch, the process of awarding government contracts has been corrupted to an astonishing degree; and a hyperbolic claim the endemic corruption of the Orban regime* [18]. As an evidence base for his words, the author cites the data of the non-governmental international anti-corruption organization Transparency International.

Despite the general negative attitude of the author of the article, certain positive changes in the life of the country are noted in the media text, in particular, a decrease in unemployment: *a good steward of the Hungarian economy; it is true that under his government, some Hungarians have done very well; reducing unemployment* [18]. Thus, the author of the article creates a dual character of the image of a politician (*ambivalence in Orban’s character*) with a great emphasis on critical remarks.

Our material has shown that despite the abundance of pejorative characteristics of the Prime Minister of Hungary, the author manages to create an image of an active political figure who is able to defend his ideas and implement his plans.

Conclusions

As a result of the analysis of a number of media texts published in the journal “Foreign Affairs” dedicated to countries such as Brazil, the Philippines, and Hungary, and their leaders, we have made the following implications:

1. The authors of the articles classify the heads of these states as populists, and political regimes as autocracies, which allows us to talk about creating and the broadcasting a predominantly negative image.
2. Media images of the states are based on the device of contrast, indicating the national characteristics of the country, certain positive transformations, with great emphasis, however, on the abundance of existing problems.
3. To create a media image of the head of the state, the authors of the articles use a wide variety of lexical and grammatical means of various stylistic tonality: expressive epithets, hyperbole, irony, and metaphors.
4. The device of intertextuality in the form of direct citation is widely used for greater evidence of the judgments cited.
5. The use of vocabulary with pejorative semantics is determined by the intention of the author of the media text to assess a person or a problem, as well as to implement accusatory and discrediting strategies.
6. Being focused on the American reader, the journal implements a strategy of demonstrating these countries as conductors of illiberal democracy and emphasises the role of the United States as an intermediary in promoting liberal and democratic values.

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