Conflictogenic Units in Modern Media Communication

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Abstract
The article studies lingual lexical and grammatical units that can be qualified (sometimes – in strictly defined contextual conditions) as conflictogens. A conflict text, being the result of a verbally expressed communicative clash of different views, inevitably includes units with explicit pejorative meaning. The analysis of such units is very important, since taking into consideration their pragmatic co-meanings makes it possible to form a culture of conflict interaction and, therefore, to cultivate a public communicative space. Based on the material of media discourse (especially media discourse of 2022), using linguopragmatic, sociolinguistic and contextual analysis, pragmatic characteristics of units that can be characterized as conflictogens have been determined. With the obvious disharmony of the interests between a person using a nomination and the object of the nomination, they do not violate social and ethical-linguistic standards. It seems the presented examples – antonomasias, the plural pejorative, zoomorphisms, precedent names and substandard nominations – do not contradict the principles of cultural conflict communication and therefore are quite possible in media space.
Keywords: conflictogens, linguoconflictology, negative evaluation, pejorativeness, invectivity, media communication.

1. Introduction

The studies devoted to social conflict emphasize its universal and comprehensive essence, caused by opposing values, interests, aspirations and needs of the subjects of social actions (Boulianne, 2019).

The syncretic interdisciplinary field of knowledge, linguoconflictology, formed in recent decades, is specifically aimed at the study of verbal means in conflict interaction, and also raises the problems of the conflict communication culture (for example, the proceedings of the conferences such as "Speech and languages of communication in the conflictogenic world" (Speech..., 2021); "Conflictology of the XXI century. Ways and means of strengthening peace" (Conflictology..., 2019) as well as the works by researchers studied different aspects of conflict text and discourse (Kara-Murza, 2020; Makarenko, 2018; Saunders, 2019; Semenets, 2021; Veliev, 2021; Wartburg et al., 2019, etc.). It is conflictological competencies that can become a condition for successful ending a conflict or, in any case, help prevent the legalizing of this social conflict.

If we admit that conflict is an integral and universal feature of the social life, conflictogens are the inevitable verbal markers of the conflict potential of a discourse.

These are rather different multi-level language units, the detailed study of which (as conflictogens) are still at the beginning. Invectives and obscenisms are studied the best of all

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(Allen, Burridge, 2006; Hobbs, 2013; Vikulina, 2018, etc.), therefore, this article will investigate other groups of conflictogens potential of which in conflict communication is not always obvious.

Conflictogens include "any object, idea, opinion, element of behaviour that reveals the difference in evaluations of conflicting subjects" (Antsupov, Shipilov, 2020: 376), but we will focus only on verbal conflictogens, and those for which this feature is not occasional.

Thus, the object of the study is the language markers of media texts with conflict potential. "Modern media discourse is characterized with conflictogenicity, … in connection with this, the issues of linguistic security, communicative ethics are acute…" (Kulikova, 2020: 5), that encourage to specially study the most acceptable ways of expressing criticism, disagreement, disapproval, pejorativeness, condemnation.

2. Materials and methods
Based on the material of media discourse (especially media discourse of 2022), using linguopragmatic, sociolinguistic and contextual analysis, pragmatic characteristics of units that can be characterized as conflictogens have been determined.

3. Discussion
The conflict text, as a rule, refers to its personalized addressee (Arceneaux, Soule, 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Golan et al., 2019; Wartberg et al., 2019). Discrediting, it means, the intention to form a negative image (and sometimes to insult, ridicule) is carried out with the help of conflictogens: they are these language means that most clearly denote the conflict situation and "turn it into the stage of verbalized confrontation" (Semenets, 2021: 17). The most obvious conflictogens – markers of a conflict text – are substandard units. For example, headline 'What else will you, *svolochi* (*bastards* – Russian jargonism, invective), be forbidden?".

 Lead: "Will the products disappear in Russian stores because of West's sanctions?"

"Write carefully about it, – Alexey Yelaev laughs. – In Western countries somebody will read and say: what else can we forbid to you, bastards to feel our sanctions? Don't show everything is fine. It is better to write: we sit and cry, sprinkle ashes on our heads" (Zotov, 2022: 16).

But there is the flip side. Without accurate information, our media are starting to go crazy. Then Kommersant (merchant; the title of the newspaper) broadcasts about the decline in oil, gas and coal producing, according to "its own sources". What are such sources? The memo *styrili* (*is stolen;* Russian jargonism) from the Energy Minister's desk or something else?" (Martsinkevich, 2022: 1).

As we can see, the "offensive" discourse (*to go crazy*, etc.) is formed, among other things, with the use of substandard).

The next review by V. Kostikov in *Arguments and Facts* is titled with the use of roughly colloquial phraseological unit (in this context it sounds rather jokingly and ironically and it is a well-detected allusion): "Who should I show *"kuzkin's mother"* to" (Russian idiom with the meaning "*to threaten*")? In the text: "In Soviet times, we boldly challenged America, threatened to "catch up and overtake". And today? Who will we compete with? Who should I show "kuzkin's mother" to?" (Kostikov, 2022: 5).

Effective actualizers of conflict meanings are expanded metaphors:

"Let's try to "understand Putin", to see the world through his eyes. For many years, you have been watching how a *garrote* have being prepared for you: how it have beingmade from the best material in the world, how it have being equipped with the most modern technical gadgets (after all, we live in the XXI century!), how it have being tried on your neck… You see all it, but you don't do anything: your hands are tied. These are the feelings … that Putin exactly felt before the special operation start. <…> After you finally break these bonds and enter into an open fight with the *owner of the garrote,* he "does not ask for mercy", but puts up a good fight to you…" (Rostovskii, 2022: 1-2). As we can see, the modern political situation in Ukraine is presented with the metaphor: the *garrote* has been prepared for Russia (for Putin), the *owner of the garrote* is the United States (Biden), but Putin did not fall into a trap (where it would be possible to use the garrote for its intended purpose).

A zoomorphic metaphor is especially often used in the analysis of modern political events:

"What is left for Scholz? Once again, to wash up, sighing sadly, like an offended donkey *Eeyore*…" (Umerenkov, 2022)

"Scholz in a matter of days lowered the status of Germany as a European leader to the *poodle* of the White House" (Umerenkov, 2022)

"At once, a lightweight, evil-speaking species of laughers and singers, the caustic whistleblower, malicious haters, refined Russophobes, fled to Israel. They look like marmosets who have climbed to the top of a palm tree and from there spit, squeal, throw coconuts at a huge, majestic herd of *elephants* passing below" (Prokhanov, 2022: 1).

"Jake Sullivan, Biden's national security adviser, a brilliant *nestling of the nest Clinton*,… on April 14 declared that nobody was going to return the seized assets to Russian businessmen in principle…" (Zaitsev, 2022: 2).

It is known, the zoomorphic metaphor is a traditional way of axiology (Jang, Kim, 2018; Kang et al., 2022; Deligiaouri, 2018) (more often the pejorative one): "…if, having hardly finished a chapter or two, I understand that I am dealing with clinical graphomania (and this is clear to an experienced eye from the first lines), then I never take up the publications of this author again, no matter what praiseworthy trills are emitted by *hired canaries* like G. Yuzefovich' (Interview…, 2021).

"Yevgeny Satanovsky: In general, I saw everyone in a coffin in white slippers (Allegorically: about something mortally bored, for example, about a mortally bored person) – diplomats, officials, *sheep* from international organizations, as well as other *sheep* who pay attention to them.

E. Golovan': As far as I understand, do you include journalists who ask questions on this topic to the sheep?

E. Satanovsky: Of course (smiles). Because it's stupid to ask questions that have a projection in the future" (Interview …, 2022: 16).

In the paper: (Geng Yuanyuan, 2018) zoomorphisms are differentiated in accordance with the degree of invectivity (low and high ones). Varieties of zoomorphisms with different intensity of invectivity are determined: a low degree of invectivity is characteristic of units the meaning structure of which includes general negative semes or negative evaluation semes, and they also have a reduced stylistic connotation – they are marked as colloquial; a higher degree of invectivity characterizes units coloured emotively, expressive and stylistically marked as disapproving, dismissive, contemptuous, expletive, rude and so on, which is necessarily reflected in the dictionary definitions of such units (Geng Yuanyuan, 2018). It should be noted that the focus on dictionary marks does not always adequately reflects the pragmatics of a particular zoomorphism, which is formed by the context, including extralinguistic – social and political – circumstances (Lane, 2020; Langer, Gruber, 2021; Manca, 2020, Shin et al., 2022), although, of course, the differences between colloquial and expletive zoomorphisms are very significant.

Media authors use hidden invectives to express their attitude (Tomaselli, 2021; Wartberg et al., 2019; Wenzel, 2019), because an explicit invective contradicts the principles of tolerance and political correctness, from which high-quality media do not retreat, even telling about the actions of Ukrainian politicians.

In this connection the headline *"Posol by ty kuda podal'she"* is indicative (*Go to hell!*). The author create the pun: *posol* in Russian is the noun *ambassador,* but children or people with a diction defect pronounce *posol* instead of *poshol* – the verd in the form of the Past indefinite tense may be used as alleoteta in Imperative mood)

We read in the text: "The Ukrainian ambassador in Berlin, Andrei Melnik, *pereplyunul sebya* (*surpassed himself,* the author used Russian phraseologism with the word spit) – he called German Chancellor Olaf Scholz an "offended liver sausage" (Umerenkov, 2022).

"Since about this time, oil tankers leaving Russian ports have increasingly indicated fantastically precise coordinates as their destination: the port of Novorossiysk – the Atlantic Ocean, the port of St. Petersburg – the Indian Ocean. Well, then. That transponders do not work on board tankers – so, then hackers are angry, then they broke down, and it is not so easy to get spare parts for repair because of sanctions. In general, we are sorry, kind people, we are innocent, you yourself *obsanktsionirovalis"* (it means "you imposed sanctions on others, but as a result you suffered from them yourselves" is the word with phraseologic meaning, formed on a model with an allusion to a rough jargonism) (Martsinkevich, 2022: 1).

Telling about the events in Ukraine, the authors of mass media often appeal to the precedent names of the Great Patriotic War:

Headline: "On the first of May, Chancellor Scholz turned into the *fuhrer*"

Lead: "Scholz supported the supply of weapons to Ukraine and rapidly began to turn into… *Hitler*"

Text: "In brief, German Social Democratic Party, the leader of which is Scholz, seems to many people in Russia to rapidly turn into National Socialist German Workers' Party. And its chairman from July 29, 1921 to April 30, 1945 was *Hitler"* (On..., 2022: 24).

"Zelensky's entourage also knew nothing about their use. Commenting on the fire on board of the "Moscow", zhovtoblakitny (yellow-blue in the Russian literary language and in Galician and Carpatho-Russian dialects, it is used for irony) *Goebbels* Mr. Arestovich, at first mockingly declared that it was some sailor who lit a cigarette at the powder magazine" (Kondrashov, 2022: 20).

Analogies seem to be appropriate. It is not for nothing that the most famous person of Russian Orthodox Church, Archpriest Andrei Tkachev, called the situation connected with Ukraine now the *Great Patriotic Special Operation*, meaning that Nazism has not gone away, but has only been hiding for a while, and Russian soldiers today, like 80 years ago, are fighting against the rabid Nazis.

4. Results

It is a well-known fact, euphemization is traditionally used to mitigate the conflict potential of the text and negative consequences of its perception. In addition, the mitigation strategy often bases on grammatical markers conveying pejorative meanings less explicitly than lexical units of reduced register, zoometaphors or precedent onims. The indisputable marker of a conflict text is the forms of the so-called plural pejorative:

"But while they were dealing with the pop of the 90s, another catastrophe arrived – the masses again slipped away into their self-satisfaction, *having sneezed on (nachikhav na* is a jargonism meaning 'to express indifference, neglect') *all sorts of talents and professionalisms* (the meaning of the word professionalism in this context is 'a high level of skill', in this meaning the word is used only in singular) *into their instagrams* (instagram is used in Russian only in singular), *youtubes* (YouTube is used in Russian only in singular and with a capital letter) *and tick-tocks* (tick-tock is used in Russian only in singular)" (Moskvina, 2021: 7).

"And all of us are waiting, and suddenly different *ikei* (ikeas), *ehichendehmy* (H&Ms), and other very valuable foreign investors will return? So, what if our small and medium-sized businesses are standing in a squat and do not understand what to do – it is possible that now you will invest in development, and then Western brands will return and their lobbyists among our officials will trample the All-Russian again" (Popov, 2022: 6).

A kind of interlingual universal (Zimina, Muller, 2021) is represented by antonomasias, which in the most cases express a pejorative evaluation, which is enhanced by lexemes such as *different, all sorts, some*, as well as writing with a lowercase letter:

"And if you blurt out something superfluous, that you don't like some *medinskys*, your patriotic tongue will be stuffed into your patriotic... Well, you understand*"* (Tukhanina, 2022: 5).

"The TV channels were filled with the most vulgar kamediklaby (comedy clubs), calques of Western programs with *Urgants, Galkins and Dibrovs"* (Bravitskaya, 2022: 27*)*.

"... the pluralization of the anthropic onym, singular in its iconic essence, consistently leads to getting offensive sound and potential conflictogenicity by such a form" (Brusenskaya, 2021: 69a). However, it is clear that first of all the offensiveness depends on the evaluation of the nomination prototype in the mass consciousness, for example, the plurative from the name of the odious character of Bulgakov's *Dog's Heart*:

"As for Tuminas, not so long ago everyone sang hosanna to him. They called him the Master – exactly, with a capital letter. <...> And now only spitting is after Tuminas. *Shvonders* who ratted on the artistic director shout about how he "disfigured the Russian classics" (Khalansky, 2022: 5.).

Thus, for the critics of the "great Master" the author uses the nomination *Shvonders*, and this, of course, is a direct insult, especially since many theatre critics (for example, famous Tatiana Moskvina) have never considered Tuminas either a Master, or even more so a great one. For example, a longstanding publication by T. Moskvina in "St. Petersburg Theatre Magazine" (Moskvina, 2009): "It would be good for Tuminas to have his own theatre for a hundred seats, where he can show his charades about the decline of the world to loving theatre critics. His existence at the Vakhtangov Theater is fraught with torments — both his and his troupe".

Another evaluation of the director's civic position long before the special operation in Ukraine: "It is impossible to say that director Rimas Tuminas is stupid or cynical. This is not cynicism, here is direct hatred to everything Russian, to the fundamentals of our culture" (Bubnov, 2015).

It is extremely important for the author to adequately evaluate the conflictogenicity (and hence pejorativeness, negative evaluation) of a grammatical or word-forming means. If there are

usually no difficulties with lexical units, then a more subtle axiological nuance with the use of a morphological form or a word-forming suffix may be unnoticed.

It would seem that the pejorative essence of the suffix -*shchin* in collective nouns (for example in the infamous nominations such as *akhmatovshchina, chukovshchina,* used in Soviet media for expressing negative attitude to A.A. Akhmatova and K.I. Chukovsky sa well as to their creativity) is well known from the history of the Russian literary language and Soviet publicism, but it turns out that sometimes this pejorativeness (and hence conflictogenicity) is poorly understood even by those who work professionally with the word, which leads to sad incidents: November 11, 2021, on the day of the 200th anniversary of the birth of F.M. Dostoevsky, the program on the *ORT Otrazheniya* (Reflections) was presented with such a title: "*Dostoevshchina today*", which, of course, is insulting to the memory of Dostoevsky and to all his admirers.

In accordance with the point of view that service words are capable of transmitting not only grammatical, but also lexical (nominative) meaning, some particles and prepositions should be included into conflictogens. For example, the work by L.A. Brusenskaya about the offensive potential of discourses, such as *eshche* (more)*, dazhe* (even), *kak ee/kak ego* (what her/what him) (Brusenskaya, 2021: 27-30b). It is a well-known fact about the primordial preposition as the source of the conflict in word combination *na Ukraine* (*on* Ukraine*)*. Back in 1993, the Ukrainian government demanded to confirm its sovereignty not only at the legislative level, but also at the linguistic level, approving the normative version *v Ukraine* (*in* Ukraine) and thus breaking the etymological connection of the country name with *okraina* (outskirts) and, consequently, with hints about Ukraine as a region, but not an independent state. However, the new "standard" was being violated for a long time both in media and in interpersonal communication, that led to numerous conflict situations.

5. Conclusion

Conflict is a diverse and multidimensional phenomenon, it is the object of analysis in modern interdisciplinary science. In linguistics, both external factors relating to the situation and the text and internal factors are significant in the analysis of the conflict.

Different words according to their place in the language system, united by a single common feature – being not from a standard cliched language, they somehow attract special attention to themselves can be used (intentionally or unintentionally) as lexical conflictogens, that is, as explicators of a conflict situation.

Even with the obvious disharmony between the interests of the nominee and the object of the nomination, they do not violate social and ethical-linguistic norms. It seems that the presented examples – antonomasias, plural pejorative, zoomorphisms, precedent names and substandard nominations – do not contradict the principles of cultural conflict communication and therefore are quite acceptable in the media space.

6. Acknowledgements

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