

The Actualization of the Linguistic Sign Charm Offensive in Contemporary English Language Newspapers

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Abstract—The paper deals with investigating the peculiarities of lexico-semantic content of the linguistic sign *charm offensive* through its contextual actualization in modern English (British-American) media newspaper discourse (2000-2018).

The author aims at revealing the conceptual mechanism of the linguistic combinability by means of conceptual metaphors analysis. Special attention is paid to the described linguistic sign as one of the manifestations of the verbalized idea of “beauty”-“ugliness” concept.

The novelty of the present research paper is proved by contemporary trends in the semantic development of the given linguistic sign conditioned by its high frequency of usage by English-speaking journalists, especially in article headings that attract readers’ attention.

The methodological and conceptual basis is grounded on the anthropocentric linguistic concept of the semiosphere of the inner human world developed by Yu.M. Malinovich as a multifaceted approach to the study of the biopsychosocial nature of a human being. The applied complex methods allowed to single out the certain features of the metaphorical conceptualization of the *charm offensive* through its linguistic combinability, to define the referential sphere of its actualization and pragmatic potential.

The results make it possible to conclude that the linguistic sign *charm offensive* as a phraseological unit in the system of the contemporary English language is actively developing the meaning of using a personal power / attraction to get the support of others, mainly in politics, and gaining a negative connotation. Moreover, the metaphorical verbalization reveals the correlation of inner and outer evaluative criteria.

Keywords—*Charm Offensive, Linguistic Sign, Conceptual Metaphors.*

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper is focused on the investigative approach to the general problem “a human-being in the language” based on the linguistic scholastic concept of biopsychosocial nature. It was developed as a complex doctrine by the scholars of Irkutsk scientific association of anthropological linguistics. Its leader, Prof. Yu. Malinovich, follows the notion of the semiosphere proposed by Yu. Lotman and states the definite system of semantically significant categories of an ego-central nature. These categories form the semiosphere of the inner human world [1].

The intended object of the present research is the linguistic sign *charm offensive* in its contextual discourse manifestation. The present study is aimed at revealing the speech actualization peculiarities based on its semantic development in modern English (British-American) through a complex conceptual analysis. A specific purpose is to determine the referential sphere of actualization and pragmatic potential through the concepts of BEAUTY-UGLINESS linguistic categorization.

The novelty of the undertaken research is proved, on the one hand, by the high frequency of the *charm offensive* usage in newspapers headlines. They attract the attention of the readers’ target audience. On the other hand, an investigative interest is evident owing to the modern semantic changes in the conceptual facet of the viewed linguistic sign that are not registered in the dictionaries but are represented in the speech actualization. The set tasks are based on the principles of the cross referential analysis [2] that involves in the focus of study a human-being as a subject of investigation and a participant of the cognitive activity.

II. METHODOLOGY

In accordance with the objective of the study a combination of methods were selected and applied in the context of the theoretical view of a word (words) as a linguistic sign(s). In the scientific approach considering linguistic actualization three aspects / levels of functioning of signs are pointed out (Ch. Morris, G. Giyom, A. Uphimtseva, V. Karasik):

- the level of the virtual entity (conceptual) of a sign;
- the level of the relative actualization revealed through the sign combinability to get the imagery-perceptive understanding of the designated notion;
- the level of the absolute actualization in speech to focus on the evaluative features of the notion determined by a sign and its illocutionary force.

A. The Practical Investigation Took the Following Procedures

Firstly, the dictionary definitions of the components of the sign charm offensive (dated 2008-2017) were analyzed and the most general semantic meanings were singled out. It should be noted that this linguistic sign was registered not so long time ago. As the Dictionary «Meaning and Origin of Phrases» (2013) states, it was recorded from the early 1990s, and

proposes a certain first definition: «a publicity campaign, usually by a politician, that attempts to attract supporters by emphasizing the aspirant's charisma» [7].

Later published dictionaries give the explanations of this notion as a phraseological unit and mark it as disapproval [JOURNALISM]:

If you say that someone has launched a charm offensive, you disapprove of the fact that they are being very friendly to their opponents or people who are causing problems for them. He launched what was called a charm offensive against MPs who might not support the Government [8]; [9].

Besides, the sign charm offensive in other lexicographical sources is nominated as:

a method of trying to get what one wants by overwhelming with reasonableness; a situation in which a person, for example a politician, is especially friendly and pleasant in order to get other people to like them and to support their opinions [10]; a series of actions intended to get people to like and trust you so that you can influence them [11]; a campaign of flattery, friendliness, and cajolement designed to achieve the support of others [12].

So, at this research stage the revealed semantic components such as “flattery”, “friendliness expressed as a way to persuade others” add to the development of a negative emotional and evaluative connotations. They make to interpret the personal charm or charisma as offensive.

Secondly, the method of studying the linguistic combinability by means of conceptual metaphors analysis (Lakoff, Johnson) [13] that has been used in speech (newspapers discourse) contexts is especially efficient due to its ability to explicate the ideas included in the mentioned above theoretical paradigm.

The analyzed British-American newspaper issues abounds in the period of 2000-2018 years to present the attempt to single out contextual metaphors to reveal the peculiarities of the speech actualization that widened the registered definitional conceptual features of the viewed linguistic sign.

So, the analysis of the factual data allowed to demonstrate the following conceptual metaphors.

B. Charm Offensive as a Campaign of Flattery

Additional conceptual features are pointed out through the specific verbal combinations typical for a newspaper style:

charm offensive is a process expressed by the phrases:

to begin one's charm offensive: Touting “a very strong personal relation” with Donald Trump, the French president, Emmanuel Macron, on Sunday began an ambitious charm offensive intended to strengthen US commitments in Syria and Iran while heading off threats of a transatlantic trade war [14];

to embark on a charm offensive: With talks on the all-important future UK-EU trade deal due to start in March once a transition deal is agreed, Britain is embarking on a charm

offensive. Phase one: send the Brexit secretary, David Davis, and the chancellor, Philip Hammond, to Germany [15];

to launch charm offensive: President Donald Trump launched an all-out charm offensive targeting opposition within his own Republican Party as he sought to secure the repeal and replacement of Obamacare [16];

to go on a charm offensive: Moscow has gone on a major charm offensive in an attempt to prove it is cleaning up its act after a series of major doping allegations, weeks before a key decision on whether to allow Russian athletes to compete at the Rio Olympics [17].

C. Charm Offensive as a Method

charm offensive is a trip, a secret weapon: The Duke and Duchess' visit has been welcomed by French press, including one magazine which noted with approval that the Royals "hadn't forgotten" the shooting. French television news described the trip as a "charm offensive", with the Royal couple designated as Britain's "secret weapon to sweeten the bitter Brexit pill" [18].

D. Charm Offensive as a Situation

The contextual conceptual features are revealed.

charm offensive is a whole entity: The FA chairman's trip to the 2022 World Cup host as part of a global charm offensive has left him on dubious moral ground. Given Greg Clarke's track record in the field of diplomatic relations, the obvious question to ask upon learning the Football Association chairman was taking in Qatar as part of the organisation's global charm offensive wasn't so much “what could possibly go wrong?” as “what could possibly go right?” [19].

The prepositional phrases contribute to this finding:

in (a) charm offensive: Over the past year, the emir has spent millions of dollars hiring lobbyists and flying influential American power brokers to Qatar in a charm offensive to win over the Trump administration — and deflate his rivals' efforts to dethrone him. Riyadh and Abu Dhabi have accused Doha of financing terrorism, cozying up to Iran and harboring fugitives, and the embargo forced changes to airplane routes and severed Qatar's only land border [20];

to put on (a) charm offensive /to be on (a) charm offensive: The maverick, confrontational style that helped Mr. Greitens win office, achieve some legislative victories and attract national attention is now hampering his efforts to weather a fierce political storm. He is on an emergency charm offensive [21].

A conceptual image is vivid as a test in the next context.

A test of charm offensive: Like most things that Mr. Trump undertakes, the president treated the grueling 12-day trip through Asia that he wrapped up here on Tuesday as a test of his own personal charisma and stamina, a marathon charm offensive that he vowed would yield quick results [22].

E. Charm Offensive as Series of Actions

This idea shows the manipulative impact on the audience and its negative effect.

to have been subject to a charm offensive: It was not the first time financial institutions have heard that message since the EU referendum. One of Britain's most successful sectors, making up 10.7pc of the UK economy, the industry has been subject to a charm offensive from senior government figures for months [23];

to mount charm offensive to persuade smb.: Hugh Grant has mounted a charm offensive with Tory MPs in Parliament in a bid to persuade them to vote for curbs on press freedoms as Theresa May warned that the plans are against "natural justice" [24];

not to fall for one's ongoing "charm offensive": The Australian judge who conducted the United Nations investigation into North Korea's human rights record has urged the world not to fall for Pyongyang's ongoing "charm offensive." [25].

III. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The undertaken observations through the complex analysis of a speech actualization of the sign *charm offensive* allowed to get the primary results and point out the certain features of the its metaphorical conceptualization based on the linguistic combinability.

1) The linguistic sign *charm offensive* designates the concept of an intricate nature. In modern British-American newspaper discourse it is represented as an event (an abstract entity) or a tool (a specified entity) to achieve some personal mercenary goals.

2) The determined negative conceptual background is particularly obvious in the basic metaphoric aspects. Moreover, the analyzed expressions define the referential sphere of the sign actualization and, eventually, its pragmatic potential. The revealed conceptual features refer the notion of *charm offensive* to the mental sphere of emotional interrelations between a person trying his/her charismatic abilities and multiple addressees.

3) A comparative approach included in the method of a definitional analysis proves the practical finding that the concept of *charm offensive* develops semantically nowadays and attracts new meaningful connotations not registered in the dictionaries.

To conclude the present paper it should be mentioned that this study is an attempt to consider only one aspect of a complex study of the verbalized part of the inner world of a human-being for better understanding the process of its conceptualization and categorization.

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