

THE IMPACT OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS ON  
POLITICAL SPEECHES

In the history of the 20- the century Margaret Thatcher has her own distinguished place.

Margaret Thatcher's speeches are extremely colorful; there is constant interplay and subtle interaction between the linguistic units and their desirable effect on the audience. The needed effect is achieved by using certain stylistic devices, which help to present the speech more vivid with obvious aesthetic impact on the hearer. The individual manner of M.Thatcher's political speeches is characterized by distinct and precise coincidence between language and thought and vast usage of stylistically colored means of the English language. These peculiarities of Thatcher's way of speaking create an individual style, which in the flow of time turned out to be a major contribution to broadening the limits of such phenomenon as political debate.

We try to analyze the impact of phraseological units on the speeches to Conservative Party Conferences, which undoubtedly can be regarded as real masterpieces, brilliant samples of text rhetoric. Margaret Thatcher came to power when the UK was facing a long period of economic and political stagnation. Her policy was a unique one and was named Thatcherism, which meant reduced governmental spending and broad privatization of governmental sector. Her severe and harsh measures provoked a storm of public protest. But she stood firm supporting her economic policy.

Let's demonstrate several types of stylistic devices in M.Thatcher's speeches. In her famous speech to the Conservative party Conference in 1980 she says:

'If our people feel that they are part of a great nation and they are prepared to will the means to keep it great, a great nation we shall be, and shall remain. So, what can stop us from achieving this? What then stands in our way? The prospect of another *winter of discontent*? I suppose it might. But I prefer to believe that certain lessons have been learnt from experience, that we are coming, slowly, painfully, to an *autumn of understanding*. And I hope that it will be followed by a *winter of common sense*. If it is not, we shall not be diverted from our course.

To whose waiting with bated breath for that favorite media catchphrase, the "U" turn, I have only one thing to say. "You turn if you want to. The lady's not for turning." I say that not only to you but also to our friends overseas and also to those who are not our friends".

In this example Margaret Thatcher identifies two notions, which have nothing in common. There is nothing known or familiar that might be shared between these two noun combinations, such as *winter* and *discontent* or *autumn* and *understanding*, or *winter* and *common sense*. The stylistic device called metaphor transfers some quality from one object to another. Winter is defined in the dictionary as a season between autumn and spring. The figurative meaning is lacking warmth or liveliness. The lack of warmth and absence of satisfaction or contentment in political life mean rather tense internal situation, full of clashes, fury and misunderstanding. But instead of enumerating existing problems Margaret Thatcher prefers to use the phrase "winter of discontent", taken from Steinbeck's famous novel, the metaphoric usage of which adds some fresh connotation to old political battlefield.

The next metaphor is "*the autumn of understanding*", which is preceded by the usage of several adverbs, *slowly and painfully*. An operation of two steps is needed for decoding the metaphoric meaning. First of all the hearer must bear in his mind the dictionary based meanings of the constituents. The following step is to unite the similar features they have and create a new image. In this example the new image of agreement, capacity for sympathizing, realizing other point of view is achieved by long run of mutual misunderstanding. The usage of the word *autumn* shows how long it took political parties to come to a consensus. But afterwards M.Thatcher uses once again the word *winter*, only this time together with a *common sense*. At first, you think that something should be wrong, why to deal again with lack of warmth or liveliness. But in politics it shouldn't be right to speak about mutually shared warm feeling in the society, which is full of controversial thoughts and ideas. It's preferable to be sober and reasonable and always try to leave feelings aside.

The famous slogan "You turn if you want to. The lady's not for turning." - comes in the continuation of the speech.

The attack on inflation by establishing control over the money supply was met by the political commentators with strong demand of "U-Turn" from Margaret Thatcher. But she was firm and despite an open letter from 364 economists, taxes were increased in the middle of the recession. And though unemployment reached 3 million in January 1982, the inflation rate fell

drastically and the economy started to recover. In this example we have two types of stylistic devices. Dictionaries give the following definition of a *u-turn*, it is a traffic notice in towns and motorways showing that the driver must change his direction at 180 angles. Second it was a pun on Christopher Isherwood's play "The Lady's not for Burning". Changing the word turning into burning M.Thatcher has created a rhythmic poetic structure easy to memorize and simultaneously making everyone remember that she will never change her economic policy.

Years will pass and in 2002 there will be an article in the Guardian with the title "The Lady is not Discerning". This is another pun on Thatcher's famous catch phrase, demonstrating how European community misses such strong politician as Margaret Thatcher.

One of the stylistic devices used by M. Thatcher is simile.

A stylistic device called simile realizes the intensification of the idea expressed in the previous part. By comparing two objects simile reveals the degree of sameness or difference. Simile ignores all the features of the objects attracting attention of the listeners to the one that is compared. Some elements called word connectives are present in the structure of similes. These connectives are such words as *like, as, such as, as if, seems*. Let's analyze the example of the simile reviewing the following example.

Speaking about western politicians M. Thatcher says, western politicians "adopt a relaxed demeanor in private discussion with the Chinese leadership, making no more than a few mild admonitions about Chinese abuses. Then they tell the outside world that "*they behaved like lions*".

In the given example Margaret Thatcher was speaking about remote resemblance of the politicians with the King of beasts. China has been an example of the violation of human rights for many years. Unfortunately some western politicians meeting Chinese leaders try to evade even fear to tackle hot issues of internal atrocities of this country. But afterwards in their interviews western politicians just speak the opposite way. Using this stylistic device Margaret Thatcher intensifies certain characteristic features of some politicians, revealing them from different, unexpected angle.

Let's give one more example from the same speech.

"We close our Conference in the aftermath of that sinister *Utopia* unveiled at Blackpool. Let Labour's *Orwellian nightmare* of the Left be the spur for us to dedicate with a new urgency our every ounce of energy and moral strength to rebuild the fortunes of this free nation."

There are two types of stylistic devices in this small passage. The first stylistic device is an allusion, an indirect reference to the word *Utopia* used in the speech. Such phenomenon as allusion presupposes certain knowledge. It implies an idea, which can't exist due to absence of certain factors. And to feed people with nonrealistic, socialist ideas equals betrayal. This is the reason why M. Thatcher uses the attribute *sinister* with the word *Utopia*.

The second stylistic device is a metonymy, which denotes relation based on some kind of association. The word combination *Orwellian nightmare* has a strong impression on the listener. As metonymy creates the concept of generalization, the frightening nightmare, which was shown in Orwell's famous novel, becomes close and obvious. And to avoid it Margaret Thatcher makes an appeal for help to everyone. She asks the people to stand together and do their duty for further stable development of Britain.

Numerous phraseological units are used in political speeches. Margaret Thatcher's language is extremely rich in phrasal units; we can even claim that her speeches are mainly phraseological. They say that idioms are not the "rhetoric of common people" (Rohrich 1991/92, vol.1:48). To create eloquent and meaningful speech one needs to be educated with good background knowledge of culture and literature.

Now let's examine one more speech of Margaret Thatcher paying attention to other types of phraseological units.

All political speeches start with formulas of address, they are called standardized speech openers (Malinowski 1923/1952). Repeated formulas of address keep up the relationship with the audience and serve as a means of cohesion.

Margaret Thatcher starts her speech to Party Conference 1990 with the following opening words: "*Thank you Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen.*" In the continuation of her speech she will never repeat the word combination Ladies and Gentlemen. Addressing the audience for the first time she spoke about her best friend Ian Gow who was murdered by IRA. A militant organization of Irish nationalists attacked members of the Conservative Party Conference. Five people died. But Margaret Thatcher insisted that the Conference must start on time the next day and made her speech as planned. At the beginning of her address paying tribute to her brave colleague she quotes from his speech.

"The message that should go out from all decent people - and 99 percent of the people in Northern Ireland and 99 percent of people in Great Britain are decent people - is that we will never, never surrender to people like this".

By quoting these words in her speech, M.Thatcher wanted to re-evaluate them. The key words of this passage are – *We will never, never surrender*. In the continuation of her talk she will repeat the same construction as if backing up the aforementioned idea. The quotation as a stylistic device is used here to follow two purposes – the first is to commemorate Ian Gow, a brave politician who was murdered by the IRA, and the second, to formulate official policy of the Government in Northern Ireland.

Margaret Thatcher in her speech to Party Conference 1990 the formula of address, that is Mr. *President*, has used 19 times. Each formula of address corresponds to a start of a new idea, which is to be revealed afterwards.

The following address to the audience contains a quotation from Ch.Dickens.

“Mr. President, this year the world seems to have relived the opening sentence of a Tale of Two Cities “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times”.

The worst of times as a tyrant Saddam Hussein struck down a small country that stands at the gate –way to the Gulf; the best of times as tyranny crumbled and freedom triumphed across the continent of Europe.”

The stylistic value of this quotation presumes the knowledge of the works of Charles Dickens on the basis of which the primary meaning of the quotation is brought out. But in M.Thatcher’s speech it acquires another shade of meaning which is completely different but it has in common the simultaneous existence of two extremes, the combination of positive and negative. On the one hand, people witness the fall of Berlin Wall, the spread of market freedom and independence among the republic of the Soviet Union, and on the other hand, the invasion of Iraqi troops into Kuwait.

“Quotations in speeches become “parent sentences” with the corresponding authority and respect and acquire a symbolizing function” (Galperin, 1981). Once B.Disraeli said “Quotation is the wisdom of wise and the experience of the ages” (Andrews, 1990). Margaret Thatcher uses them quite often, she likes to quote Charles Dickens, Winston Churchill, Goethe, Shakespeare and many other famous writers or politicians. As a rule, quotations follow formulas of address, anticipating new idea, which is later going to be revealed or spread out.

The third formula of address brings forward democratic factors that will save the world and which are considered to be Britain’s special legacy.

“And everywhere those who love liberty *look to* Britain. *When they speak* of parliaments *they look to* Westminster. *When they speak* of justice *they look to* our

common law. And *when they seek* to regenerate their economies, *they look to the transformation we British have accomplished.*"

Here comes repetition as the most widely used stylistic device in political speeches. The repetition of parallel constructions *when they speak, when they seek – they look to* embellish the politician's speech, intensify the ideas and strengthen their impact on the listener.

The primary function of the formulas of address is to serve as a means of cohesion whereas form the point of view of semantics; they are considered to be semantically void, lacking any useful information.

Another aspect of stylistic coloring can be observed in the passage introduced by the 9<sup>th</sup> formula of address.

"Last week, Mr President, I seemed to hear a strange sound emanating from Blackpool. And I thought at first it was sea gulls. Then I remembered that Labour was holding its annual Conference there. And I realized it wasn't seagulls, it was chickens – chickens being counted before they were hatched... That was a case of counting chickens after they'd flown the coop."

One of the strategies adopted by a politician is to create the concept of threat. The negative interpretation of political accomplishments of their enemies is achieved by using different linguistic tools.

M. Thatcher in the first sentence – *I seemed to hear a strange sound emanating from Blackpool* manages to give highflown connotation to the atmosphere of reality. The second sentence is much more grounded. She speaks about seagulls. There is nothing special in these birds. Dictionary gives the following definition of the word seagull – common sea bird with long wings. In the third sentence she compares their sounds with Labour Party Annual Conference. In the fourth one M. Thatcher rejects the comparison of seagulls with the Labour Party. She diminishes their role comparing them with chickens.

There is some discrepancy between the highflown pattern of the first sentence and the rest of the passage. The contextual meaning reveals absolute negation of the positive concept.

This stylistic device used here is called irony. "The effect of irony lies in the striking disparity between what is said and what is meant." This "striking disparity" is achieved through the intentional interplay of two meanings, which are in opposition to each other."(Galperin, 1981).

In the following sentence she uses another tool that can greatly increase politician's ability to hold people's attention. Well-known proverb "Don't count one's chickens before they are hatched" is used in an altered form, evoking

another shade of meaning that is complete annihilation of the Labour Party as political figure in Great Britain.

The inappropriate use of phraseological units plays an important role in political discourse analysis.

Liberal Party is even more ridiculed by her. Speaking about the Symbol of Liberal Party she says: "I gather that during the last few days there have been some ill-natured jokes about their new symbol, a bird of some kind... This is an *ex-parrot*. It is not merely stunned. It has ceased to be, expired and gone to meet its maker. It is a parrot no more. It has rung down the curtain and joined the choir invisible. This is a late parrot."

Comparing the Liberal Party with a parrot M. Thatcher wants to show that the mission of this party is to imitate, repeat often without understanding what others say. The shattered image of this party is drawn by the usage of words *ex-parrot*, *stunned parrot* and in the end *late parrot*.

In the continuation of her speech we shall come across such set-expressions as *theatre of absurd*, *guardian of the peace*, *beacon of hope*. We have to admit that the use of these stylistically rich elements of speech makes the politician's language fresh and expressive.

In political speeches phraseological units are displayed in a number of ways. Proverbs and sayings, metaphor and metonymy, simile, quotations, greetings, etc. enrich political speeches making them more impressive and exciting.

Margaret Thatcher served longer than any other British Prime Minister in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She has been a kind of icon for politicians. Her speeches are of great importance and up till now attract broad layers of society. She has used numerous phraseological units with special liking for one thing over another. And this is the reason why they are especially interesting for linguists as their observation from the linguistic point of view reveals new aspects of text rhetoric.

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