

COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGY OF MITIGATION IN GERMAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE (BASED ON THE INTERVIEWS OF WOMEN- POLITICIANS OF GERMANY)

The article examines the communicative strategy of mitigation in the women's political discourse in Germany, which belongs to the cooperative discourse. The concept of mitigation is described. Mitigation is aimed at softening categorical statements, creating a favorable atmosphere for communication and avoiding conflict in communication in general. The texts of the interviews are analyzed in order to identify and describe the tactics of the mitigation strategy. In the course of the study, the methods of contextological analysis and semantic-stylistic analysis are used, the combination of which makes it possible to identify the actual meaning of the statement and establish their various stylistic functions in political discourse. To confirm the reliability of the results obtained, the method of quantitative calculation was also used.

Key words: women's political discourse, femininity, communicative strategy, communicative tactics, cooperation, mitigation, reasoned regret, moderate qualimetry, recommendation.

КОММУНИКАТИВНАЯ СТРАТЕГИЯ МИТИГАЦИИ В ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОМ ДИСКУРСЕ (НА МАТЕРИАЛЕ ИНТЕРВЬЮ ЖЕНЩИН-ПОЛИТИКОВ ГЕРМАНИИ)

В статье рассматривается коммуникативная стратегия митигации в женском политическом дискурсе Германии, которая принадлежит кооперативному дискурсу. Описывается понятие митигации. Митигация направлена на смягчение категоричности высказываний, создание благоприятной атмосферы общения и избегание конфликта в общении в целом. Анализируются тексты интервью с целью выявления и описания тактик стратегии митигации. В ходе исследования применяются методы контекстологического анализа и семантико-стилистического анализа, сочетание которых позволяет выявить актуальный смысл высказывания и установить их различные стилистические функции в политическом дискурсе. Для подтверждения достоверности полученных результатов применялся также метод количественного подсчёта.

Ключевые слова: женский политический дискурс, фемининность, коммуникативная стратегия, коммуникативная тактика, кооперация, митигация, аргументированное сожаление, умеренная квалиметрия, рекомендация.

Problem statement

Currently, more and more attention of scientists is directed to the study of cooperative strategies. This is due to the growing interest in women's political discourse and the use by women politicians of feminine (cooperative) strategies and tactics aimed at compromise, understanding, cooperation, and achieving communicative agreement.

Knowledge of certain norms and rules of communication, politeness, benevolence, sense of humor, focus on teamwork, assistance and mitigation in general help to avoid conflict [Takhtarova, 2013, p. 135], which creates the basis for cooperative communication. In foreign linguistics, mitigation is defined by the term mitigation [Caffi, 2007; Fraser, 1980; Langner, 1994; Thaler, 2012]. Mitigation is aimed at softening categorical statements, creating a favorable atmosphere of communication and avoiding conflict in communication in general.

Mitigation is a word of Latin origin (from *mitigatio* – to soften), means softening or calming. In German, it is denoted by the terms relaxation (*Abschwächung*), restriction (*Eindämmung*), mitigation (*Linderung*, *Mäßigung*, *Milderung*, *Minderung*, *Verringerung*). In his work “Mitigation as modification of illocutionary force”, German linguist V. Thaler argues that mitigation is one of the common, even universal, conversational strategies used by pragmatically competent speakers [Thaler; 2012, Online source].

The term “mitigation” was introduced into pragmatics by B. Fraser in 1980 in the context of language techniques aimed at minimizing possible undesirable effects (unwelcome effects) in situations where the speaker’s speech behavior can lead to conflict [Fraser, 1980].

Both domestic [Karakulova, 2015; Takhtarova, 2013; Ezeh, 2018] and foreign linguists [Caffi, 2007; Fraser, 1980; Haverkate, 1992; Thaler, 2012] are engaged in the study of mitigation. A mitigation strategy is used to weaken verbal confrontation and/or reduce tension (associated with negative emotions) in a verbal conflict.

At the same time, it should be noted that the study of the category of communicative mitigation focuses in the works of different linguists on different types of discourse. Thus, S.S. Takhtarova considers the mitigation in the everyday and institutional types of the discourse of German and Russian languages [Takhtarova, 2010], S.S. Karakulova in German political discourse [Karakulova, 2016]. This means a certain limitation of the available data and leaves an extensive field for the study of strategies and tactics of mitigation in political discourse.

To date, there is no single universally recognized definition of the concept of “mitigation”. “Mitigation” is considered by different scholars as a modification of the speech act (reduction of some undesirable effects that the speech act has on the listener) [Fraser, 1980, p. 341], as an umbrella category that includes a wide set of strategies through which the speaker softens the interactive aspects (interactional parameters) of his speech to reduce potential communicative risks [Caffi, 2007], as a speech strategy that limits violation of the “territory” of the interlocutor [Langner, 1994, p. 22], as a stylistic means of implementing non-categorical judgments, as a communicative category, the main content of which is prescriptions, settings and rules, determined by the maxims of politeness and aimed at minimizing communicative risks in interaction, implemented in communication mitigative strategies and tactics, marked by ethnocultural specificity [Takhtarova, 2013, p. 135].

Materials and methods of research

The material was the texts of interviews of German women politicians that are publicly available on the Internet (A. Merkel (CDU), U. von der Leyen (CDU), K. Kipping (die Linke), S. Wagenknecht (die Linke), A. Nales (SPD), B. Storch (AfD), F. Petry (AfD)). The women politicians we have chosen are the leaders of modern political parties in Germany. Each political party has its own website (www.cdu.de, www.alternativfuer.de, www.die-linke.de, www.spd.de), where political speeches and interviews of all politicians are freely available. Every female politician also has an official personal page on which the texts of her political speeches and interviews are presented. The texts of the 21 interviews that were taken for analysis cover the time period from 2017 to 2021. One statement was taken as a unit of research.

Research results

Our analysis made it possible to identify a set of mitigation tactics used by politicians that implement a mitigation strategy. These include tactics of reasoned regret, moderate qualimetry and recommendations.

1. Reasoned regret. This tactic is used to reduce the communicative failure in a potentially conflict situation of communication, ensures the preservation of a favorable atmosphere of communication, demonstrating a good attitude towards a communication partner. Often a politician resorts to using the tactics of reasoned regret in order to mitigate his disagreement with the opponent’s statement, explain the reasons for disagreement, argumentation and explanation of his opinion on the issue under discussion:

[1] *Wagenknecht: Es ist völlig klar, dass wir heute die Geheimdienste nicht abschaffen können. Wir müssen uns anschauen, was unsere Geheimdienste tun und wie sie arbeiten. Bisher ist es nicht gelungen, uns zuverlässig vor Anschlägen zu schützen. Beim Verfassungsschutz ist es wirklich die Frage, ob er eine effektive Arbeit leistet. Er hat beim NSU eine absolut dubiose Rolle gespielt. Und anstatt sich mit islamistischen Gefährdern zu beschäftigen, bevor diese Anschläge ausführen, werden immer noch Teile der Linken überwacht. Da gibt es erhebliche Defizite. Aber dass man auf Geheimdienste heute nicht verzichten kann, ist leider offenkundig. Deswegen ausdrücklich: auf lange Frist [SW_PI_2017].*

In this example, S. Wagenknecht notes with regret the impossibility of refusing the work of the special services, explaining and arguing his conclusions on this issue.

The speech markers of this tactic are words with the semantics of assumption (*vielleicht, wahrscheinlich*), the use of the subjunctive mood of the verb to soften the statement, words of apology (*schade, leider, es ist bedauerlich*), verbs of apology/regret (*es tut mir leid, bedauern, um Entschuldigung bitten*). In the examples below, politicians, expressing regret, use markers-amplifiers (*leider zu grosse Angst, natürlich außerordentlich bedauerlich, sehr schade*):

[2] *Petry: Aber Sara Wagenknecht hat leider zu große Angst gehabt, daraus eben eine wählbare Alternative zu machen [FP_PI_2019].*

Politicians often use the tactics of reasoned regret when they present a competitor or themselves on the positive side. For example, the leader of the party “Linke” S. Wagenknecht, speaking about the party of “Linke”, regrets that they only managed to win millions of votes to a limited extent, who fled in recent years from the party, “SPD” (SPD):

[3] *Wagenknecht: Es ist der Linken leider nur begrenzt gelungen, die Millionen Wählerinnen und Wähler zu gewinnen, die sich von der SPD in den letzten Jahren abgewandt haben [SW_PI_2018].*

2. Moderate qualimetry (recognition). In an interview situation, a politician is forced to evaluate himself or third parties who are not directly involved in communication [Takhtarova, 2010, p. 77]. The need for communicative mitigation in assessing the state of affairs is dictated by the desire of the politician to save his face. The analysis of the factual material shows that the tactics of moderate qualimetry can be implemented using the impersonal pronoun *es*, the indefinite-personal pronoun *man* in order to indirectly assess the situation:

[4] *VdLeyen: Man glaubt das kaum, wenn man es sieht [UL_PI_2017].*

Modal verbs in Konjunktiv (*könnte, müsste, sollte*) and the passive voice are used for the purpose of diminutive evaluation. In the following example, the vice-chairman of the AfD party, B. von Storch, discussing his competitor Z. Gabriel, softens the negative assessment of his activities with the help of an indefinite-personal construction (*man kann als ... bezeichnen*), adds to this phrase the mode of assumption *vielleicht*, indicating the degree of truth, confidence in the assessment. Then the politician gives his assessment of what is happening and says that in the future such issues should be solved differently:

[5] *Storch: Sigmar Gabriel hat die Kandidatur von Steinmeier arrangiert, um ihn aus dem Außenministerium wegzuloben. Damit wurde das Amt des Außenministers für ihn frei. Er konnte dann die Position des Parteivorsitzenden und Kanzlerkandidaten an Martin Schulz abgeben, und sich damit aus der Affäre ziehen. So etwas kann man vielleicht als kluge Karriereplanung von Sigmar Gabriel bezeichnen, aber nicht als angemessene Art, einen Bundespräsidenten zu finden, der das ganze Volk repräsentieren soll. Das sollte in Zukunft in Deutschland anderes entschieden werden [BS_PI_2017].*

The use of modal verbs in the subjunctive mood and the passive voice for the purpose of mitigative evaluation is found in the following examples:

[6] *Storch: Der Bundespräsident müsste in solch einem Fall die Unterschrift verweigern und das Gesetz zurückverweisen statt einfach der Erfüllungsgehilfe der herrschenden Parteien zu sein [BS_PI_2017].*

The tactics of moderate qualimetry involves the use, first of all, of means of propositional mitigation, namely, modus operators indicating the attitude of the subject of opinion to the propositional content [Karakulova, 2016, p. 78]. The markers of subjectivity of opinion in German are the stable expressions *meiner Meinung nach, aus meiner Sicht*, etc., the verbs *glauben, meinen, finden, denken* and other verbs that implement the softening of the propositional attitude by indicating the subjectivity of opinion:

[7] *Nahles: Ich finde es gut, dass in Deutschland nicht nur Millionäre – ich korrigiere mit Blick auf die USA – nicht nur Milliardäre Minister werden [AN_PI_2019].*

In their speeches, female politicians often use adjectives with the meaning of evaluation (*ich finde das gut, schlecht, wichtig* u.a.). In the example below, the use of a modus operator expressing evaluation (*halten für falsch*) indicates the speaker's attitude to the content of the statement, to the person being discussed:

[8] *Storch: Da hat Geisel richtig gesagt, da sind die Länder für zuständig. Ich halte das an dieser Stelle allerdings für falsch, weil hier tatsächlich wir in Deutschland eine besondere Verantwortung haben, und das, was wir von den Al-Kuds-Tagen her kennen, das ist nichts anderes als die Verbreitung von Hass, von Aufruf zu Gewalt, das ist eine Plattform für Antisemitismus [BS_PI_2019].*

In this example, the politician first positively evaluates the words of Geisel (*Da hat Geisel richtig gesagt*), then expresses his negative attitude to the situation in the country (*Ich halte das an dieser Stelle allerdings für falsch*), calls for certain decisive actions and measures in the fight against anti-Semitism, but does it gently, reducing the categorical judgment through markers of subjectivity of opinion.

The tactics of moderate qualimetry involves the use, first of all, of means of propositional softening, namely, modus operators indicating the attitude of the subject of the opinion to the propositional content [Karakulova, 2016, p. 78]. Markers of the subjectivity of opinion in German are the stable expressions *meiner Meinung nach, aus meiner Sicht*, etc., the verbs *glauben, meinen, finden, denken* and other verbs that soften the propositional attitude by indicating the subjectivity of the opinion:

[9] *Nahles: Ich finde es gut, dass in Deutschland nicht nur Millionäre – ich korrigiere mit Blick auf die USA – nicht nur Milliardäre Minister werden [AN_PI_2019].*

3. Recommendation. This tactic involves inducing action in an indirect form, that is, more gently and delicately. Russian Russian Dictionary's new explanatory and word-formation dictionary defines a recommendation as a review containing a characteristic of someone, something (usually favorable); a written review of a person, usually with a guarantee for him; advice, instruction, instruction [New Explanatory and Word-formation Dictionary of the Russian Language, 2012: Online document]. The goal of the recommendation tactic is to convince the recipient to perform an action that is useful for him.

An urgent recommendation involves the speaker identifying specific steps necessary to achieve the goal. The shade of "urgency" can be softened by using the subjunctive mood. The verb *sollte* in the subjunctive mood is used in the sense of recommendation, advice:

[10] *Nahles: Wir sollten jedenfalls damit anfangen, uns darauf vorzubereiten. Wir sind in der Lage, schnell zu reagieren [AN_PI_2018].*

The advice expressed in the form of an imperative sounds quite intrusive and harsh. Therefore, using the verb *brauchen* will give the recommendation less categorical. Thus, A. Merkel argues that the country needs even more jobs with good salaries. This statement sounds like a recommendation for action to create such jobs, but this recommendation is an indirect incentive:

[11] *Merkel: Natürlich brauchen wir noch mehr gute Arbeitsplätze mit gutem Einkommen. Insgesamt jedoch hat sich die Lage sehr vieler Menschen verbessert [AM_PI_2017].*

The use of assumption markers together with modal verbs softens the motivation and gives the statement a recommendatory character:

[12] *vdLeyen: Für viele, viele Soldaten speist sich daraus heute schon ihr Selbstverständnis. Vielleicht müssen wir das noch stärker herausarbeiten [UL_PI_2017].*

A pronounced recommendation occurs to us in the following statement and is expressed through the verb *empfehlen*:

[13] *Merkel: Das Auswärtige Amt hat seine Reisehinweise für die Türkei mehrfach den aktuellen Ereignissen auch an Touristenzielen angepasst und präzisiert. Ich empfehle jedem, diese Hinweise ernst zu nehmen [AM_PI_2017].*

In this example, A. Merkel recommends that everyone take the instructions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs seriously.

Thanks to the listed speech markers, the tactics of the recommendation acquires special flexibility and softness in dealing with the interlocutor, which makes the impact on the communication partner more effective.

So, we can observe a certain set of tactics within the strategy of mitigation. The tactics of the mitigation strategy described by us perform the main role - softening the categoricity of the statement. For this purpose, women politicians resort to the use of tactics of reasoned regret, moderate qualimetry and recommendations.

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