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Linguistic Political Prognostics: Models and Scenarios of Future

Anatoliy P. Chudinov[a,*], Olga A. Solopova[b]

[a]*Ural Pedagogical University, 26, Kosmonavtov Avenue, Yekaterinburg, 620017, Russia*
[b]*South Ural State University (National Research University), 76, Lenina Prospekt, Chelyabinsk, 454080, Russia*

Abstract

The present paper briefly recalls theoretical preconditions for forming a new approach – linguistic political prognostics. The authors review theories and methods used for strengthening a future focus in political discourses and work out two main tools – a model of future and a scenario of future. The paper examines implications of metaphorical analogies for modeling future in mass media. The authors argue that metaphor is not merely a rhetorical ornament in the political discourse of media regulation but a conceptual model that legislates and regulates our understanding of future.

Keywords: linguistic political prognostics; cognitive linguistics; future research; political discourse; model; scenario; metaphor

1. Introduction

The future is obviously a feature of our understanding time. Time is inseparable from the person, it models the person as a social being, and the person in his turn models time and consequently there is always a temptation to sense and predict future. Nowadays the problem of future has emerged with the utmost urgency. Faced with the complexities and challenges of the times, much effort has gone into the development of models and scenarios through which to comprehend the future of a country and to guide the navigation of policy-makers.

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +7-912-230-7173
   E-mail address: ap_chudinov@mail.ru

2. Prospective Function of Political Discours

Core analytical concepts include visions, projections, forecasts and plans (Bestuzhev-Lada, 2007), and continuities of past, present and future. In the world of forecasts the object of our analysis is political projections, with Russia's political system and political processes being their main targets. Essential distinctions among the notions "vision, projection, and forecast" are proposed by A. Isserman (Isserman, 1884).A projection is not a prediction but merely the result of entering hypothetical assumptions into a mechanistic quantitative procedure. Projections are not predictions of the way the future must or will unfold. They are only mechanical exercises that spell out *the future implications of current trends or past ratios* without assessing the validity of assumptions used to make this or that projection.

A string of recent articles and books has stressed prospective functions of political discourse. That's due to the fact that politicians and journalists often reckon the experience of their predecessors, try to evaluate the present situation and either promise «extrinsic benefits that are contingent on a candidate's victory in the election» (Anderson, 2004) or threaten the public with coming catastrophes.

E. Lassan points out that the triple opposition "past-present-future" is one of the most important valuable oppositions contemporary political discourse based upon (Lassan, 1995).Insights into prospective function of political discourse can be drawn from D. Graber who holds that any political discourse includes prediction of the future and reflection on the past (Graber, 1981). G. Lakoff places the future among five implicit categories that define both a progressive culture and a progressive form of government, and encompass all progressive policies. That is the moral perspective (Lakoff, 1987).

A. Chudinov stresses a structuring function of the metaphor. He has come to an understanding that metaphors play a crucial role in framing world models and comprehending interrelation between their elements (Chudinov, 2003). T. Shmeleva thinks "communicative future" to be an integral part of any speech genre (Shmeleva, 1997). E. Sheygal considers proclamation of political policy for the future among the dominant characteristics of inaugural speech (Sheygal, 2000). V. Dauletova exploring the genre of political autobiography also pays special attention to "communicative future"(Dauletova, 2004).

The advantage of the cognitive approach is the ability to determine mental schemas or cognitive models underlying any political text (Budaev&Cudinov, 2008). The structure and content of these cognitive models are important to effectively study the mode of thinking of those who represent political and non-political institutions in a particular historical period. They also help to build "predictive models in political science" (Basilev, 2007).

A growing number of recent linguists have been trying to establish metaphor at a cognitive level. One of the fundamental findings of cognitive science is that people think in terms of frames and metaphors. G. Lakoff places the human act of cognition in the center of attention; his brilliantly presented result is that cognition is vitally dependent on metaphor, which he defines as a mapping of conceptual structures from one domain onto another (Lakoff, 2004). He says that framing is about getting language that fits your worldview. The ideas are primary – the language carries and evokes those ideas (Lakoff, 2002).

Scholars stress the crucial importance of metaphor in discourse interaction: many accounts of figurative schemas and language are concerned with: (a) what is conceptualized in terms of something else and how this process takes place; (b) exploring metaphors in various genres of political discourse; (c) cognitive rhetoric, etc. Metaphorical thinking is to some extent necessary and unavoidable; it advocates a critical stance with respect to the utilization and circulation of metaphor, shaping the future at the same time.

3. Objective and methods

Linguistic political prognostics is supposed to be a new synthesis of theories and conceptions of future proposed in future studies, political science and cognitive linguistics. Using tools of future studies, political science and cognitive linguistics, linguistic political prognostics studies models of future based upon exploratory forecasts made by authors of political texts. Thus, the basic constituents of the methods are models of future and scenarios of future in the political discourse of different chronological periods. A model of future serves a basis for scenario development, a scenario in its turn being its linguistic representation. The central tool in any scenario is a cognitive metaphor. The main objective is to draw attention to the prospective function of metaphor framing it within such a

purposeful typified activity as political discourse. This aims at understanding what interpretation of future events we can reconstruct from analyzing the metaphors used in this discourse.

4. Linguistic Political Models of Future and Scenarios of Future

Linguistic political future research is concerned with elaborating models and scenarios of future in political discourse of different chronological periods. A model is used as a tool to get an idea of possible options for future development of society, helps to better understand the driving forces shaping it. In other words such a model is a kind of identification of drivers and trends.

4.1. Working Out a Metamodel

The metamodel used in the approach is a matrix –"methodology of forecasting and historical models" (Mathius, 2003) covering the evolution of various parameters of Russian socio-political system. Many different trends occupy the same historical time line. Examples include population, housing, changing technology, financial markets, and the rise and fall of political regimes. These parallel trends are not independent and are clearly linked. Forecasts often address only a limited set of possible trends, focusing on one part of the future to the exclusion of other factors. As the authors' interest is political discourse, the process of constructing the metamodel (which in fact is a system of parameters) includes creating a conceptual model of political future. Its basic components are domestic and foreign policies. Basic parameters (domestic policy and foreign policy) in their turn can be divided into subsets – factors most frequently addressed in mass media when referring to the image of Russia's future as the main force at home and abroad that form the image of Russia and its possible political future is Russian-sensitive mass media.

These subsets are quite numerous. In order to reduce the level of complexity they therefore have to be grouped into some generic categories. So the basic parameter "foreign policy" is divided into the following subsets: relations with the USA, relations with Europe, relations with CIS ("near abroad"), relations with Asian countries. The basic parameter "domestic policy", in its turn, can be divided into the subsets: political and economic situation, population, natural resources, and armed forces (Fig. 1).
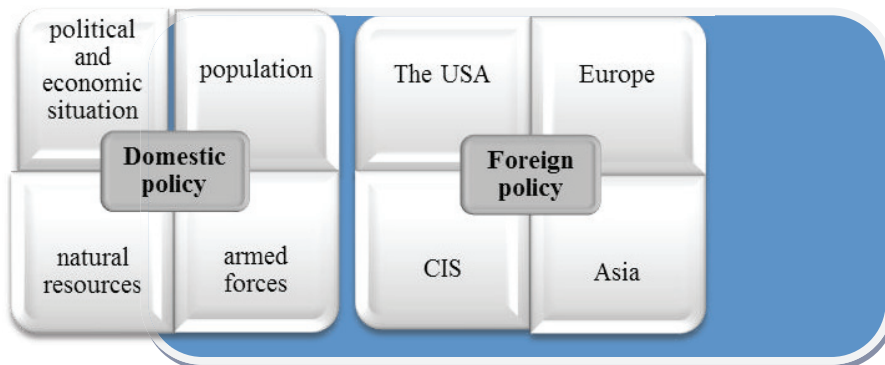

Fig. 1. Metamodel of future

Models are constructed for each historical period analyzed. They are based on the data obtained from a particular discourse– Russian, American or British – of a certain chronological period. These are static matrices used to compare differences and similarities of models in political discourses of Russia, the US and Britain. They represent a system of conceptual assumptions concerning a hypothetic situation in Russia's future from the standpoint of the present or the past. To interpret this or that political discourse is to know its background, to understand expectations of the author and the audience, their hidden motives, plot schemes and favorite logic transitions typical of a particular historicera (Demyankov, 2002).

Dynamic matrices are used to reveal development, deterioration or amelioration of models in the political discourse of one and the same country throughout different chronological periods. They are supposed to be an intelligent understanding of dynamic processes by which the future evolves and may be shaped. The purpose of the model is to present possible trends.

4.2. Scenario-building

A cognitive scenario, as it has been stated above, is a sort of linguistic representation and verbalization of each conceptual model. Scenario-writing is especially useful to politicians as a way of sensitizing themselves to various possibilities of the future, which can then be planned for (or against). Scenarios can be either state or process driven. State scenarios are those that offer a vision of what the world will be like at a specified point in the future without describing the process by which this end state is achieved (in the present research these are scenarios constructed for a static model). By contrast, process scenarios describe the circumstances and sequence of events through which a particular vision or end state is realized (in the present research these are scenarios constructed for any dynamic model). In P. Schwartz's conception, the value of scenario-building lies not in predicting the future but in preparing to respond intelligently to whatever the future holds in store (Schwartz, 1996).

Thus, scenarios describe two alternative futures, one a best-case scenario and the other a worst-case scenario (Fig. 2). These scenarios are not meant to be credible but rather to provoke response by contrasting two alternative views of the future (Ahremenko, 2004). In this sense they are more like visions. They neither act as guides to preparation nor suggest strategies for action, but instead rally interest and prod people into thinking about possibilities of future, scenario axes being its two extremes.

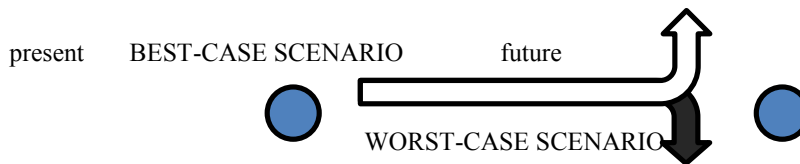present   BEST-CASE SCENARIO   future

WORST-CASE SCENARIO

Fig. 2. Scenario axes

Scenarios are developed in an exploratory manner. Exploratory scenarios are concerned with the uncertainties of the future (Slaughter, 1990): they are created in order to understand alternatives the future holds and forces driving these changes. Exploratory scenarios are our understanding of the fact how several trends will extend forward and interact with one another, shaping new possibilities and patterns of behavior in the process. These scenarios are purely model-based. Scenarios are tools created to structure analysis of opportunities that future may bring about. They highlight challenges and dynamics of each particular model of future and differ from one another in strategically significant ways. Thus, scenarios demystify the future by reducing complexities while bringing several perspectives into consideration at the same time.

4.3. Scenario and Metaphor

The central tool in a scenario is a cognitive metaphor. Traditional tools for forecasting depend much on the metaphor to describe auspicious and inauspicious future conditions. Meant for further conceptual analysis of each model, a scenario analyzes metaphorical means used to create an image of future. It helps to understand which metaphors are used to describe dynamics and drivers of change. «The future» can often be understood and foreseen with the help of the answers to metaphorical questions «the present» poses.

A scenario includes some frames that form its backbone (Fig. 3). They are as follows:

- The frame «Actors» answers the questions: "Who are the most important actors (creators, destroyers, allies, adversaries) in the scenario? How might they be expected to act?" For many "the future can only be understood metaphorically as configured around archetypal figures" (Sheygal, 2000), personal saviors may take political

forms; politico-economic progress for many people is only possible through a patron who is the very focus of projections.

- The second frame in the scenario is "Time and Space" analysis. It answers the question: "Where is the future of Russia: in its past, present or future?" The future is not a disconnected end-state that exists only in the future, instead, "the future should be viewed as a continuous unfolding in time that is rooted both in the past and present. Both the past and the future are mediated through the present component of the future" (Perloff, 1980). The past component of the future has to do with all those elements that will be inherited from the past into the future and will have to be accounted for in shaping the present that in its turn shapes the future. The other metaphorical question answered within the frame is "What place will Russia occupy on the geopolitical map?" The time frame and spatial scale of a projection are positively associated with one another.

- The third frame aims at "Consequence" analysis. The questions this frame answers are "Why will it happen?""What will follow these changes?" The future may be understood in terms of why it is brought about or experienced and what follows it– in terms of metaphors derived from consequences. In this vein, the rapid accumulation of problems and the avoidance of considered response can make of the future a situation in which "the chickens come home to roost" ("grim future"). The adequate response may bring to life "bright future".
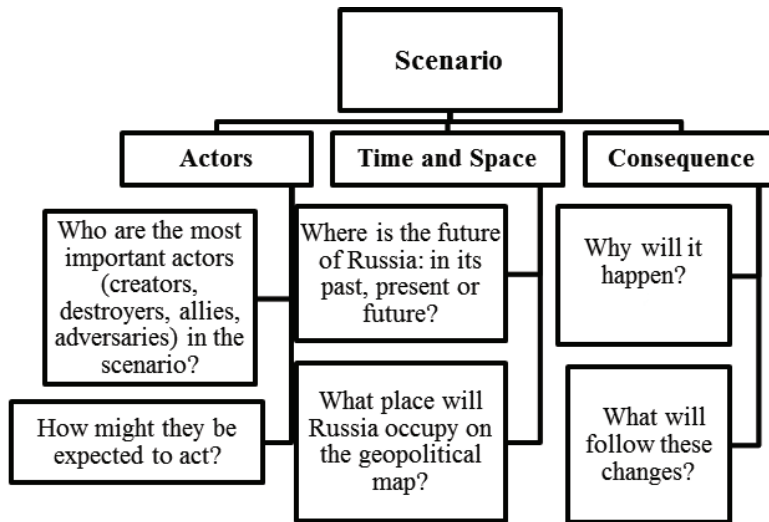

Fig. 3. Scenario of future

5. Conclusion

In the contemporary world the media have adopted metaphors as a kind of short cut to understanding that world. Linguistic political prognostics is based on using models and scenarios that help to foresee "different ends" Russia is destined to as viewed by mass media in Russian, American and British political discourses. The present research analyzes models and scenarios of Russia's future through a system of metaphors – clustersoffrequentlyusedmetaphoricalunitsbelongingtocertainconceptualsourcedomainsthatstructure perceptions of future in political discourses of a particular historical period, or of different historical periods. Each model can be realized through at least two scenarios representing its extremes –"bright" and "grim". The future is understood through metaphorical questions the present poses.

As a final remark, it must be noted that depicting future either in the most favorable light or portraying it in dark colors is frequent and efficient means used by mass media and politicians in political discourse. The reason for it is one of the main driving forces of all human actions – their hope that some day things will change for the better. On the other hand, "attention should be given to the ways in which metaphors can be used as weapons to entrap and

isolate – and even kill"(Lakoff, 1887) the whole country.

There is a need of negotiation between the role of model and metaphor. Models need the inspiration of rich metaphors. Use of metaphors needs the discipline of modeling. The means for regulation and solving this problem is an exploratory scenario, intermediary between a model and a metaphor.

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