The linguistic aspect of presidential debates has been analyzed from different perspectives. Researchers investigate the strategies used by politicians to impact their electoral base [3], [4], [5]. They also consider the stance and linguistic means was televised debates participation.

Pre-electoral discourse being a part of political discourse has become a focal point of researches in the field of political science, social philosophy, media linguistics and political linguistics. The electoral component of political communication has acquired great prominence recently, as modern electoral campaigns prove to be a never-ending process [1, P.95]. The pre-electoral situation is characterized by a high level of political confrontation which reaches the greatest point of its intensity during televised presidential debates [2, P.170]. In American political realm televised debates encompass primaries when the electoral situation is characterized by a high level of political confrontation which reaches the greatest point of its intensity.

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The linguistic units of the sample fall into two main categories: realia and idioms. By realia we understand the items that represent some aspects of a particular political and social contexts which are closely associated with a specific culture. Idioms can also be culture-specific as they contain culture codes that linguists describe as their cultural connotation [7]. The realia single out in debate texts pertinent to the political realm, social sphere as well as cultural norms and practices.

Classification of culture-specific components of the 2020 presidential debates

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Political realia include nominations well established in the English language as well as some new words and phrases that became a part of mainstream vocabulary due to the emergence of new phenomena. The former type can be exemplified by the nominations bumper sticker and hanging chads:
Senator Klobuchar: What I think we should do is make things more affordable [...] do something for the people of America, instead of a bunch of broken promises that sound good on bumper stickers [8].

Bumper stickers are a type of political advertisement extensively used in the US during electoral campaigns alongside posters and pins. In the context of debates they serve as representations of slogans that are never implemented.

Joe Biden: Except we had a thing called an election with hanging chads in Florida and it was not reauthorized [8].

By hanging chads they understand the fragments of card ballots, which were not punched the whole way leaving a piece dangling. Such votes were not counted by the machine, thus because of this technical error people’s votes were not valid.

As for the new political realia mentioned by presidential hopefuls, they include such names as white supremacists, Antifa and Me Too:

D. Trump: But I’ll tell you what, somebody’s got to do something about Antifa and the left because this is not [a] right-wing problem .... This is a left-wing problem [9].

The words Antifa and MeToo denote new movements that promote liberal values, while white supremacy is a new label that masks the old issue of racial segregation. It is a euphemism employed to substitute for the terms that have become socially unacceptable.

Social realia used by the candidates denote some elements of American educational landscape:

Bernie Sanders: We are going to triple funding for low-income Title I schools, because kids’ education should not depend upon the ZIP Code in which they live [8].

The democratic contender speaks about schools where the majority of children are from low-income families, so they are entitled to government subsidies, and Zip Code in this context stands for underprivileged neighborhoods.

Another term belonging to social realia is redlining:

M. Bloomberg: Redlining was not the problem of the mortgage market... [8].

Though the notion of redlining is usually associated with banks discriminating against people of color, Bloomberg underlines its financial basis which is not connected with ethnicity.

The discussion of issues of illegal immigration brought about the usage of the slang word coyote in the final presidential debate:

D. Trump: These children are brought here by coyotes and lots of bad people, cartels, and they used to use them to get into our country [10].

The slang noun coyote is used to denote someone who smuggles immigrants into the US across the Mexican border. The metaphorical meaning of this word is based on the association with an animal who prays on the weak unable to defend themselves. The animal meaning of this word originates from the language spoken by the indigenous people of Central America, and it is widely used metaphorically by Mexican-American community.

Cultural norms and practices are referred to in the following critical remark of Senator Klobuchar that expresses her opinion of President Trump’s relationships with the North Korean leader:

He literary thinks he can go over and bring a hot dish to the dictator next door and he thinks everything is going to be fine [8].

To describe Trump’s close ties with North Korea Senator Klobuchar uses metaphorical mapping. It refers to the practice of helping neighbours, as Americans tend to greet new arrivals to the neighborhood by bringing them some hot dishes.

Apart from realia culture-specific linguistic units embedded in presidential debates rhetoric include typically American idioms that are endowed with cultural connotation. Being asked about the sources that might help to fund the proposed free universal health care, Bernie Sanders gave the elusive answer: “I can’t rattle off to you every nickel and every dime”. It is a transformation of the idiom nickel and dime that means “something not important because it does not involve much money”.

Another transformed American idiom was used by Joe Biden in reference to his opponent Tom Stayer who also participated in the South Carolina Democratic debate:

Where I come from it is called Tommy come lately [8].

The original idiom Johnny-come-lately underwent transformation that involved the substitution of the proper name Johnny for Tommy to fit the specific political context. That was Biden’s way to say that his rival was late to join the conversation and missed his turn to speak.

Conclusion

The analysis of presidential debates rhetoric shows that culture specific units employed by American politicians in pre-electoral discourse encompass realia and idioms. The former incorporate political and social realia as well as the units denoting some cultural norms and practices. As for idioms, they originate in American culture and are normally transformed to fit the political context of debates.

Конфликт интересов Conflict of Interest

Не указан. None declared.
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