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THE MOST PRODUCTIVE WAYS TO NEUTRALIZE DISCRIMINATORY MARKED LEXICAL UNITS IN
ENGLISH LANGUAGE MEDIA DISCOURSE

Research article

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is the search of the most productive tool for neutralizing discriminatively marked lexical means in English language media discourse. The linguopragmatics of neutralized discriminative marked lexical means allows the eliminating the discriminative effect and significantly increases the chances of successful communication. The research material is represented by the Internet foreign media texts. We analyzed them through critical discourse analysis. According to the results of the analysis of 250 media texts containing discriminative lexical means of nominative spheres "Ethnic identity" and "Gender identity" we define the main tools of neutralization. They are euphemization, reduction of stigmatic terms, and exclusion of invectives. According to the research results, the authors conclude that euphemization is the most productive tool of neutralization of the discriminative lexical means in nominative spheres of "Ethnic identity" and "Gender identity". Neutralization by euphemization enables communicants not only to avoid the use of discriminative lexical means, but also can make communication more effective.

Keywords: neutralization, euphemization, discriminative, lexical means, communication, mediatext, media discourse.

ОПРЕДЕЛЕНИЕ НАИБОЛЕЕ ПРОДУКТИВНЫХ ИНСТРУМЕНТОВ НЕЙТРАЛИЗАЦИИ
ДИСКРИМИНАЦИОННО МАРКИРОВАННЫХ ЛЕКСИЧЕСКИХ ЕДИНИЦ В АНГЛОЯЗЫЧНОМ
МЕДИАДИСКУРСЕ

Научная статья

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Аннотация

Целью исследования является поиск наиболее продуктивного инструмента для нейтрализации дискриминационно маркированных лексических средств в англоязычном медиадискурсе. Лингвопрагматика нейтрализованных дискриминационно маркированных лексических средств позволяет устранить дискриминационный эффект и значительно повышает шансы на успешную коммуникацию. Материал исследования представлен иностранными медиатекстами Интернета. Мы проанализировали их с помощью критического дискурс-анализа. По результатам анализа 250 медиатекстов, содержащих дискриминационные лексические средства номинативных сфер, «Этническая идентичность» и «Гендерная идентичность», мы определили основные инструменты нейтрализации. Это эвфемизация, сокращение стигматизирующих терминов и исключение ругательств. По результатам исследования авторы приходят к выводу, что эвфемизация является наиболее продуктивным инструментом нейтрализации дискриминационных лексических средств в номинативных сферах «Этническая идентичность» и «Гендерная идентичность». Нейтрализация с помощью эвфемизации позволяет участникам коммуникации не только избежать использования дискриминационных лексических средств, но и может сделать общение более эффективным.

Ключевые слова: нейтрализация, эвфемизация, дискриминация, лексические средства, коммуникация, медиатекст, медиадискурс.

Introduction

The foreign language learning includes the study of speech communication standards, linguistic, and cultural specificity of the language. As country's culture is inextricably linked to its language, the social modernization leads to the language changes. Therefore, protecting the interests of the different ethnic groups, national and sexual minorities, people with disabilities, as well as groups fighting for animal rights, and environmental conservation involves the use of special neutral language. We should note that media discourse is the main sphere in which this language is in use. Thus, **the purpose** of this study is to consider the phenomenon of linguistic neutralization of discriminatory marked lexical units in the media discourse and determine the most productive language tools for this particular neutralization.

Research methods and principles

Object and subject of the study. We define the "Ethnic identity" and "Gender identity" media discursive spheres of use of discriminatory marked lexical units as the object of the study.

Research material. We identify the most productive tools of linguistic neutralization in contemporary English-language media, the thematic focus of which can be attributed to the nominal spheres of "Ethnic identity" and "Gender identity".

Research methods. We use a continuous sampling method to identify neutralized media-discursive lexical units. Also, we identify a critical discourse analysis as the main type of analysis.

Main results

The principle of lexical neutralization continues to have a significant impact on the communicative interactions in the society. According to researcher Y. V. Shlyakhtina, this principle "has become an integral part of the ideology, mentality and communication tool of American and Western European cultures" [1, P. 56]. Hence, there is a need to reconsider the use of the discriminatory marked lexical units in the communication process.

F. Beckwith and M. Bauman define lexical neutralization as "a network of interrelated ideological attitudes that question the foundations of university education: the traditional curriculum, views on the objectivity of the acquired knowledge, attaching importance to cultural, gender, class, and racial differences" [2, P. 165].

The Western mass culture influenced on both society and media discourse, as media discourse is "the most dynamically developing type of discourse, which is a combination of various means of communication and methods of information transmission. It forms a media environment, which, due to the absence of information boundaries, could change, evolve the social phenomena, and adapt to them" [3, P. 133]. Indeed, a characteristic feature of the Western media discourse sources is the tendency to use neutralized lexical units.

According to our previous research, euphemisms, exclusion of invectives, and reduction of the stigmatic patterns are the tools of linguopragmatic neutralization of discriminatory marked lexical units [4, P. 130].

In our study we examined a corpus of 250 mediatexts from the Western media sources that can be categorised under the nominal sphere of "Ethnic identity" and "Gender identity". The nominal sphere of "Ethnic identity" contains 155 mediatexts; the nominal sphere of "Gender identity" contains 95 mediatexts. According to the results of the research, 82% of the discriminatory-marked lexical units of the nominative sphere under study are neutralized in media discourse through euphemizing of the concepts; 10% and 8% of lexical units, respectively are neutralized through the exclusion of invectives, and the reduction of stigmatizing patterns. The main type of analysis was the critical discourse analysis (CDA).

According to the results of the analysis, euphemizing of the discriminatory marked lexical units under study is the most common tool of the concepts neutralization. Applying the principle of analogy and considering the results of our previous research, we can conclude that euphemizing of media discourse concepts is the most productive tool for neutralizing the discriminatory marked lexical units under study in terms of the principle of political correctness.

The results of our study are shown in Figure 1.

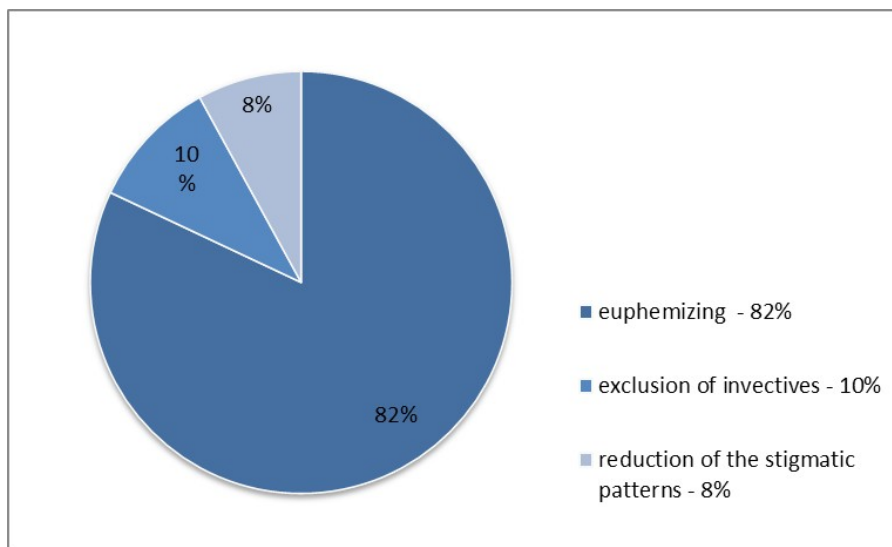


Figure 1 - Tools for neutralising discriminatory-marked lexical units in the nominative spheres of "Ethnic identity" and "Gender identity"

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We analyzed the discriminatory-marked lexical units in the nominative spheres of "Ethnic identity" and "Gender identity" in terms of identifying the most productive tools of linguopragmatic neutralization. Thus, we can conclude that the most productive tool for linguopragmatic neutralization of these nominal spheres is the euphemizing of the concepts (82%), while the proportion of discriminatory-marked lexical units neutralized through the exclusion of invectives, and the reduction of stigmatising patterns, account for a total of 18% of all the lexical units analyzed.

Since, we consider it necessary to give a definition of the euphemism. For example, the Large Encyclopaedic Dictionary "Linguistics" edited by V. N. Yartseva defines the euphemisms as "neutral words that do not contain an emotional marks and are used to replace synonymous words and expressions considering something rude and inappropriate to the speaker, as well as words that hide and conceal the true essence of the signified" [5, P. 89].

We consider examples of media discursive neutralization of discriminatory marked lexical units in accordance with the principle of political correctness through euphemizing of the concepts.

The reinterpretation of the names of ethnic and national minorities is expressed by the media discursive neutralisation of discriminatory marked lexical units in accordance with the principle of political correctness. The first linguistic transformations took place for the reinterpretation of the identification of the black population in the United States. So, until the first half of the twentieth century, black people were called *negro* (*Negro*). This word came from Spanish *language*. However, the discriminatory marked *nigger*, *nigga* began to use along with the neutral *negro*. In the 1960s, with the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, the lexeme *negro* was gradually replaced by the lexeme *black* because of its homonymic similarity to the discriminating lexemes *nigger* and *nigga*. The main purpose of this replacement was the attempt of black people to emphasise racial significance, particularity and, of course, to contrast themselves with members of the *white race*. Nowadays, the most politically correct ethnonyms are *African-American* or *Afro-American*. The similar examples of lexical units neutralized by euphemizing to refer to black people in different countries are *Afro-Canadian*, *Afro-Caribbean*, etc. Also, there are fewer common euphemisms: *member of the African Diaspora*, *person of black race*, etc.

However, the tendency to use *Black* alongside *African-American* or *Afro-American* persists in media discourse sources.

We consider the mediatext by Bloomberg, 2021:

*Google reported its best year yet for hiring **Black employees**, but rising departures of the same group highlights a risk to the company's plan to double its **Black workforce** [6].*

According to the mediatext, Google defines people's race and national identity is defined by the euphemism *Black*, which is intentionally used with a capital letter as a sign of respect for people of that ethnic group.

Also, we consider the mediatext by The Guardian, 2022:

*The 14-year-old from Harvey, Louisiana, breezed to the championship at the Scripps National Spelling Bee on Thursday night, becoming the first **African American** winner and only the second **Black** champion in the bee's 96-year history" [7].*

By using euphemism, media discourse sources, considering the principle of political correctness, neutralize the discriminatory lexical unit *Negro* with the neutral lexemes *African American* and *Black*. Moreover, we can observe the immediate using of both lexemes.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that discriminatory marked lexical units remain in use in speech, while in media discourse such units are artificially neutralized.

We can also consider the mediatext by Daily Mail, 2022:

*When Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh was on the District of Columbia Circuit Court of Appeals, he joined a ruling allowing a lawsuit to proceed against the federal mortgage lender Fannie Mae. The court said a single use of **the N-word** "might well have been sufficient to establish a hostile work environment" [8].*

The mediascursive use of the discriminatory-marked lexemes *Negro*, *negro*, *nigger*, *nigga* is offensive, unacceptable, and even legally banned [9]. Thus, describing the speech use of the discriminatory-marked lexemes *Negro*, *negro*, *nigger*, *nigga*, the media discourse sources use neutralized *the N-word*. Nevertheless, the tendency to use discriminatory marked lexemes *Negro*, *negro*, *nigger*, *nigga* persists in society.

Other discriminatorily marked lexical units of the nominative spheres under study are also changing.

For example, the lexical units of the nominative sphere "Ethnic identity" *Indian* or *Red Indian* are not correct; the ethnonyms *indigenous person* and *Native American* are preferable.

Meanwhile, the lexical neutralization principle had an extensive impact on the nominative sphere of "Gender identity".

In the 1970s, the English language was declared sexist because of the presence of the component *man*. It is not only caused a change of the English language but became a prerequisite for the emergence of gender-neutral language. Many lexical units containing the morpheme *man* have changed as a result of socio-political and socio-economic factors. Indeed, *barperson*, *businessperson*, *police officer*, *fire fighter*, *camera operator* instead of *barman*, *businessman*, *policeman*, *fireman*, *cameraman*, appeared. These changes are related to liberal-oriented policy of the state and the increasing popularity of the transgender movement in the West countries. As a consequence, gender-neutral language appeared. For example:

***Three firefighters** were killed and another was critically injured after part of a row house collapsed, trapping them inside as they battled a blaze, the authorities said [10].*

Most firefighters are males, but since there is no strict gender restriction in the USA, a woman can become a firefighter, too. In this context, the media discourse source uses the neutralised gender-neutral lexical unit *firefighters*.

Although neutralization is a rather new linguistic phenomenon, even such traditionally unchanging areas of lexical usage as family relations are affected by it. For instance, the traditional *husband* and *wife* were also neutralised, becoming *partner* and *companion*.

We consider the following mediatext:

*The US can continue its appeal against the decision not to extradite Julian Assange, a court has ruled, as **his partner** said the family had received death threats and pleaded for their "nightmare" to end [11].*

When analyzing this mediatext, we can note that the authors define the wife of a famous mediaperson Julian Assange with a neutralized *partner* instead of *wife*; the androcentric nature of English does not allow us to identify the gender of Julian Assange's partner. In our opinion, the use of the gender-neutral lexical unit *partner* makes it difficult to understand this mediatext, because it is impossible to determine exactly what is the gender identity of Julian Assange's partner and what is the relationship between them: they can be business partners, because they have different last names; they can be husband and wife, they can be in a so-called "common-law marriage", i.e. they live together without registering their marriage; they can be golf partners, etc. The media-discursive use of a neutralised *partner* lexeme makes it difficult for the recipient to adequately understand the information.

Conclusion

Therefore, the use of neutralised discriminatory marked lexical units quite often makes it difficult to understand media discourse and requires the recipient to have extra-linguistic knowledge. Thus, the neutralization is a very interesting and rapidly developing linguistic phenomenon of the modern time. Evidently, the phenomenon of neutralization is characterised by dynamic changes in language; it is promising and requires further study. In this context, we can identify euphemizing as the most productive tool of neutralization. Media-discursive sources try to exclude discriminatory marked lexical units and use neutralised lexical ones. Nevertheless, the speech use of discriminatory marked lexemes persists. We realised that the use of neutralised discriminatory marked lexical units quite often makes it difficult to understand media discourse and requires the recipient to have extra-linguistic knowledge.

Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

Рецензия

Все статьи проходят рецензирование. Но рецензент или автор статьи предпочли не публиковать рецензию к этой статье в открытом доступе. Рецензия может быть предоставлена компетентным органам по запросу.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

Review

All articles are peer-reviewed. But the reviewer or the author of the article chose not to publish a review of this article in the public domain. The review can be provided to the competent authorities upon request.

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