

English-language media discourse in the digital age: psychological mechanisms of functioning

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Abstract. The article raises the problem of the English-language media discourse which in its interaction with the basic psychological mechanisms of human consciousness (goal-setting, attitude and reflection) at the age of digitalization has created a new form of media discourse environment providing communication and influence on both native English speakers and non-native ones. The theoretical, as well as statistical and content analyses conducted in the research, allowed identifying two media blocks (two types of media discourses) in the English-speaking media world that have different goal-setting mechanisms, attitudes and reflection levels. The findings of the study based on the example of a political theme zone frequently circulated in the English-language media discourse demonstrated how the interaction and mutual influence between the psychological mechanisms and the media discourse are changed and depend on whether the information flow is generated by the institutional English-language media discourse or it is presented and promoted by individual media actors.

1 Introduction

Modern English-language media discourse is a complex integral phenomenon, "a huge layer of culture" [1] not only for the English-speaking society, but also for the entire world community, taking into account the role that English plays as a means of global communication, or "lingua franca". English-language media discourse is a global leading mediator for almost all spheres of social life on the planet. Political and economic models, scientific breakthrough discoveries, international academic programs, the world of sports, showbusiness and fashion are all circulated and processed in the English-language media discourse space; they are filtered by its unique features and presented to the international audience as an effective tool of communication, influence and exposure. One can observe the English-language media discourse as a role model for the media world, represented in other languages. Even within the English-language media discourse itself, there is the stiff competition which depends on each English-speaking country dominance on a global political, economic and military scale. Overall, we may assume that the English-language discourse which includes not the only stream of local and world news and reports, but also video channels (like Youtube) and traditional TV channels as well as digital TV platforms (like Netflix), popular social networks, blogs, wikis and mobile phone apps, has turned into a special new form of reality that reaches the consciousness of a native as well as non-native

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speaker, incorporates into it, activates its psychological mechanisms and can make an impact on a person's cognition, emotions and behaviour.

Thus, within the framework of this study there appear several research questions, presented below.

RQ1. Who and what mediates the English-language discourse?

RQ2. What basic psychological mechanisms define its effect on native and non-native speakers across the planet?

RQ3. How are these mechanisms embodied in the media language?

2 Background

The history of the development of the present-day English-language media discourse dates back to the 15th century when printing and mass distribution of books began to develop in Europe. Later on, the political expansion of the United Kingdom and its further transformation into one of the largest maritime empires in human history contributed to the appearance of the first newspapers in the kingdom itself as well as in its colonies (in North and Central America, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Africa). The industrial revolution of the XIXth century and the digitalization of the globe in the XXth century revolutionized the English-language media world. The print press has started coexisting with its online versions on the Internet media platforms. Since the creation of such technology giants as Google, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, the image, functions and mission of the English-language media have changed dramatically. Nowadays the contemporary English-speaking media world and the discourse it represents have become "modus vivendi" (mode of life) for billions of people on the planet, no matter if those people speak English or other international languages. The reasons for such a powerful argument regarding the English-language media discourse can be explained, for one part, through its geographical location and functioning. For the other part, its influence is greatly defined by a human (psychological) factor, that is *how* human consciousness interacts with the English-language media discourse and *what* social outcome is received in the end.

2.1 English-language media discourse: geography of distribution and functioning

Modern English-language media discourse is a cultural and social phenomenon which has always drawn the attention of linguists, sociologists, psychologists, educators and political technologists. We support the opinion of Allan Bell, a New Zealand academic and sociolinguistic researcher, that there are key, instrumental reasons for this particular scientific as well as social interest [2].

First of all, the English-language media discourse has become an easily accessible source of language data for research and teaching challenges. For another thing, it represents powerful linguistic institutions and constitutes a large proportion of the language that people perceive on a daily basis. Moreover, it may also reflect and shape both language use and attitudes in a particular speech community. For non-native speakers, the English-language media discourse is functioning as the primary—or even unique—source of various speech patterns. In the third place, the ways the English media use language is interesting linguistically in their own right. For example, the representation of different dialects and languages which are applied in news, advertising, blogging, radio and TV interviews, political campaigns and business presentations. Finally, the English-language media discourse space is a direct reflection of ubiquitous social institutions in the world. It may be described as a key presenter of the English-speaking world - or the Anglosphere - [3] and its culture, politics, and social life, shaping as well as reflecting how these are formed, evolved and expressed. Today the

English-language media discourse is important both for what it tells people about an English-speaking and non-speaking society in a particular country and for what it contributes to the character of this society. Therefore, it is important to understand the relationship between an individual (both a native English speaker and a non-native one) and the English-language media discourse space, between human consciousness and its mechanisms which interact with the media discourse and produce actions that may influence a person's worldview, his behaviour, personal life, social status, beliefs and destiny.

2.2 Psychological mechanisms of human consciousness in their interaction with the English-language media discourse

Our research is primarily based on the definition of the notion "mechanism" given by a Soviet psychologist Sergey Rubinstein who observed it as the "process of awareness of a person's experience of his attitude to something very significant for him". [4]

In addition to this interpretation of the concept of "mechanism", in our scientific study, we will also consider it, as a process of influence, driven by the inclusion of verbal and non-verbal systems to establish communication for the transmission of information that is necessary for joint activities.

The psychological mechanisms for presenting information in a media discourse space is, first of all, a hierarchical structure, which includes three basic mechanisms that influence an individual in the process of his interaction with a media discourse: the mechanisms of goal-setting, psychological attitude and reflection. [5]

The goal-setting mechanism involves the identification of several key goals and objectives of the media content necessary for presenting a media discourse to the communicants with their "correct" (directed) perception and subsequent actions. The mechanism of psychological attitude is a given representation of information in a media discourse; highlighting a specific audience to which some knowledge or information will be addressed. It is important to emphasize that the readers may also have a certain psychological attitude to particular media content or its senders. When interacting with media discourse space and the perception of media content in the minds of the recipient, there is an understanding and analysis of the information received. In this situation, we are talking about the process of reflection on a perceived piece of information by the individual's consciousness [6].

The theoretical analysis of the interaction between the psychological mechanisms of human consciousness and the English-language media discourse has shown that this interaction is presented in *two blocks*. The first block is *institutional* and the second one is *private*. The institutional representation of the interaction between the psychological mechanisms and the English media world finds its reflection in a so-called "top-down model" [7]. This model represents the formation and transmission of the information flows by the official media platforms (e.g. BBC, CNN, CBS, etc.). The main characteristic of this model is a pre-thought scenario in the construction of the media discourse space. People in power with their vision of the world, their life goal-settings, attitudes and reflection introduce important multiple theme zones [8] which are supposed to be socially just and accepted by all other layers of society. At the same time, there is an opposite block that reflects the interaction between the psychological mechanisms and the English-language media discourse. This is a private block, a complete antipode, which is a "bottom-up model" of the media discourse construction [9]. Ordinary people, independent bloggers and influencers, freelance journalists usually represent their attitudes, goals and reflections about the functioning of society. They also focus attention on some significant theme zones or create and represent their ones. Their independent voices add spontaneity into the promotion of the information flow in the media discourse space. Thus, the present-day English-language

media discourse is interacting with human consciousness in two opposite dimensions – institutional vs private and collective vs individual. The researcher M. Skey insists on finding a balance between these two oppositions – “incidents” vs “scenario” – in the construction of the media discourse [ibid]. Therefore, the psychological mechanisms of human consciousness will represent different poles of people’s mindset in the media discourse space whether they are native English language speakers or foreigners.

3 Methods

This study of interaction and mutual influence between psychological mechanisms and the English-language media discourse is based on several methodological approaches, for example on critical discourse analysis so as “to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between discursive practices, events and texts, as well as wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes” [10]. The relationships between psychological mechanisms of human consciousness and the English-language media are complex, ever-changing and including social actors who represent both individual personas and fundamental institutions. Therefore, for a better and deeper understanding of the interaction between human consciousness and the media discourse in the English-speaking world we use another important approach and that is a sociolinguistic one. It was developed by W. Labov and his followers (Labov 1972; Chambers, Trudgill 1980; Trudgill 1986) [11] and is based on the proposition that all linguistic changes occur and are transmitted through specific people united in social groups [ibid]. The information in the media discourse environment is constructed, presented and promoted by people and with the help of them. Thus, the central role in the generation of the definite media discourse belongs to human consciousness and its basic psychological mechanisms – goal-setting, reflection and attitude. As there is an inextricable link between our consciousness and language, then it is important to focus the attention on analyzing the linguistic implementation of the above-mentioned psychological mechanisms in their interaction with the media discourse space that covers the English-speaking media world. For this purpose, our research contains the statistical and content analysis of the lexical units that show the best examples of a linguistic representation of the psychological mechanisms in the English-language media discourse on the level of two blocks – the institutional and private ones. The following English-speaking media platforms were used in this study: BBC, The Guardian, The Daily Mail, The Telegraph, The Independent, The Economist (The United Kingdom); CNN, The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, The USA Today (USA); The Toronto Star, The National Post, The Vancouver Sun (Canada); The Australian, The Canberra Times, The Sydney Morning Herald (Australia); The New Zealand Herald, Auckland Star, The Press (New Zealand) over the last 10 years. Besides, the videos posted by English-speaking organizations and individuals on a Youtube channel were watched and carefully analyzed to perceive the impact of the English-language media discourse on people's consciousness for both native speakers of the English language and non-native ones. A contrastive analysis also helped us understand how different theme zones (politics, business, technology, entertainment, etc.) introduced in different English-speaking media discourses may influence the cosmopolite audience differently.

4 Results

One of the brightest theme zones where the psychological mechanisms of human consciousness function especially well is *politics* (on average about 3,350,000,000 results

in Google search engine). Vigorous political debates between opponents, presidential races and parliamentary elections have always been emotionally discussed in multiple English-language media discourses. At present, the most important event in the English-speaking world is the presidential campaign in the United States of America between the current president Donald Trump and the former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. Table 1 below demonstrates how the information flow about the confrontation between two political leaders is circulating in the institutional media discourses of the English-speaking world.

Table 1. Linguistic functioning of psychological mechanisms in their interaction with the Institutional English-language media discourse

Region	English-speaking country	Media platform	Institutional Media discourse
North America	USA	New York Times	Who Won the Debate? Political Observers Weigh In. Grading on a curve, political experts said President Trump did not hurt himself . But they said neither did Joe Biden and that maybe all that matters so late in the game [12].
North America	Canada	Toronto Star	For Canada, the last U.S. presidential debate held a glimmer of hope . President Donald Trump not only seemed to take the advice of his advisers to tone it down a bit from the last time, he also played mostly by the rules — helped along by a strong and able moderator [13].
Europe	Great Britain	BBC	“US President Donald Trump and his White House challenger Joe Biden are feuding over plans for their final TV debate. With two weeks to go until the election, Mr Biden has a commanding lead nationally in opinion polls. However , he has a smaller lead in the handful of key US states that will ultimately decide the outcome” [14].
Oceania	Australia	The Sydney Morning Herald	“Trump was at his best when painting Biden as a career politician who has spent most of his life working in Washington - "all talk and no action" in Trump's words. Biden was at his best when speaking directly to the American people, expressing empathy for how their lives have been upended by the COVID-19 pandemic” [15].

Oceania	New Zealand	The New Zealand Herald	<p>“United States President Donald Trump has taken on Democratic challenger Joe Biden in the final presidential debate before the US election, claiming Covid-19 is "going away" and comparing his work in the Black community to Abraham Lincoln's.</p> <p>The debate in Nashville was a final chance for the pair to make their cases to a television audience of tens of millions of voters before the November 3 election.</p> <p>The six major topics being discussed were: fighting Covid-19, American families, race, climate change, national security and leadership” [16].</p>
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As can be seen from table 1 the English-speaking media world is cautious enough to choose a clear political favourite. The media-discourses introduced by the US, British, Australian and New Zealand media send quite a neutral and well-balanced attitude to the audience, which says that “Neither Trump nor Biden is a winner yet”. The Canadian media discourse sounds more affirmative about Trump’s ability “to play by the rules”, but still they only have “a glimmer of hope” about the last debate and there is not a definite explanation of what the concept “hope” means. Thus, the whole goal-setting mechanism of the English-language media discourse focuses on informing people about the elections rather than defining a winner beforehand. The English-language media platforms reflect on this major political event in the US contemporary history but they are not going to be too radical in their estimates and judgements.

On the contrary, the analysis of private English-language media discourses is demonstrating an opposite effect. Independent American bloggers and ordinary people who are interested in politics have a stronger attitude about future political winners. Their goal is to support their candidate (Trump or Biden) and they reflect on these two notorious political figures in “black and white” colours. The statements below represent and prove these observations.

e.g. Austin, Austin TX, Oct. 23

“First time in four years that Trump seemed prepared and staying on message. That is a **big win for himself, for his party, and for the country** considering that he still is the elected president.”

e.g. CW, Left Coast, Oct. 23

“Trump’s **biggest failing** was **his inability to speak** directly to **the American people**. When asked what he would say to black families about police violence and "the talk," he couldn't do it. Instead, he bragged about how great he is and attacked Biden [17].

Regarding the feedback from an international community on the political debate in the USA, the first impression is a lot of irony and play of words on a linguistic level.

e.g. Antonio Jones: “I see **no changes. Tupac**” [18].

e.g. Robert A: “Abe Lincoln is watching from above like “ what has become of America?” [ibid]

e.g. Vladislav Syabrenko: “This is the level
 "Other **countries pay you!**" - "**No, you!**"

I saw this in **kindergarten**” [19].

Other independent reviewers are less ironic and more conscientious about the world’s future which depends on the US presidential elections in a certain way.

e.g. Chris Hansen: “Trump is a bigot. Those who still can’t admit it? I guess they’re afraid of **our changing world**. I feel sad for them, but we can’t let them stand in the way of a **multicultural world**. If we can’t achieve a **multicultural world, we’re all doomed**”[20].

Therefore, it is obvious that there are contradictions between psychological mechanisms of goal-setting, attitude and reflection in their interaction with institutional and private English-language media discourses. While interacting with the private media discourse (blogs, comments, self-made videos, etc.) psychological mechanisms of human consciousness are more pronounced and braver and open to the social audience on linguistic and extralinguistic levels. “Vox populi” (voice of the people) reflects such attitudes of media actors to the social development of the world as a stable, eco-friendly, multicultural future with fewer corrupted politicians, populists and businessmen.

Simultaneously, the basic psychological mechanisms – goal-setting, attitude and reflection – in their interaction with the institutional English-language media discourse often produce a more neutral, less emotional and “behind the scenes” estimates which can be interpreted by anyone ambiguously. Probably, the present-day English-language media discourse environment is changing its information policy by trying to better inform rather than influence while sticking to a more neutral attitude towards a piece of news or at least not imposing a definite opinion too openly.

5 Conclusions

The modern epoch of breakthrough digital technologies has revolutionized the basement of the English-language media discourse on linguistic and extralinguistic levels. Multiple media platforms like Google, Facebook, Apple, etc. have become the triggers that split the English-language media discourse into two main block models – the institutional media discourse and the private one. The presence of two fundamental media discourse mediators has reshaped and redesigned the influence of the English-speaking media world on human consciousness. Depending on what media block model represents the news and interacts with the audience, the outcome will vary in terms of a different goal-setting mechanism, attitudes and reflection with multiple palettes of emotions (from a neutral viewpoint to irony and radicalism) and the choice of linguistic means.

The English-language media discourse is playing a dominant role in the modern digital civilization. Its influence goes far beyond the English-speaking world and in many political, economic, scientific and social ways defines the lives of peoples on the planet. Therefore, the questions which logically appear in this case is how human consciousness should resist to such rigorous expansion of the English-speaking media world dominance and how psychological mechanisms should function while interacting with this world to protect each person’s uniqueness and freedom on a global scale. We hope that in future our findings will help scholars devoted to the problem of media discourse studies find reasonable and argumentative answers to the research questions mentioned above.

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