

## Research Article

### Applied Aspects of Russian Political Discourse

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**Abstract:** Any text is a product of author's contemplation aimed at the discourse and new contemplation. The same can be said about the political text. The political text greatly depends on the cultural situation of the particular historical period. The present study analyses the functioning of the political text in Russia today. As the epistemological tool in the present article, we used the modern research of applied aspects in the political contemplation and political discourse. The applied relevance of the present article is conditioned by new ("network") forms of the discourse in the XXI century. As a result of the analysis, the following conclusions have been made: 1) the crisis-conditioned character of the modern politics and culture has an immediate impact on the functioning of the political text in Russia; 2) in the present-day conditions, the communication between the subject and the object of the political text has changed dramatically; 3) the notion of the "political text" itself, existing in the context of the historical change, have long ago gained a new applied content that needs contemplation. The conclusions of the present study are aimed at realizing a very important factor: the drive for renovation of the language of the political science due to critical changes in the modern Russia has more and more supporters. In the world of global projects and total leveling that seduce people, the culture of political contemplation as a kind of an "art of survival" has gained critical importance.

**Keywords:** Applied discourse, contemplation, modern culture, political text, Russian politics

## INTRODUCTION

A political text is a phenomenon formed due to interaction between two fundamental spheres of human activity-politics and culture; each of them is, in their turn, conditioned by power and conscience, respectively. Both the politics and culture are prone to change. The authorities regard the contemplated change, whereas the conscience is formed through a certain authority-related context. The strive of authorities to stay in power demands that the authorities keep pace with the changes. As for the conscience, its primary aim is comprehending the meaning of those changes. The political text is a natural embodiment of that meaning. From the formal viewpoint (sociolinguistic and socio-cultural), a political text is such a systematized, meaning-conditioned word order, that is created by a politician, or on his/her behalf. The aim of this text is some social change in relation to a political context. At the particular moment the text is a topical political document. However, on the very next day, as the situation is relieved, it becomes a document of purely ideological relevance and, finally, it becomes a historical exhibit. This is why the political text has no

meaning outside the particular context-from the viewpoint of its semiotic components (Young and Soroka, 2012). The process of creating a political text, its usage and reproduction in other people's minds (applied discourse)-this all was comprehensively disclosed in such works as Edelman (1985), Ricento (2000), Morris (2001), Laver *et al.* (2003), Hart *et al.* (2006), Johnson-Cartée (2005), Joseph (2006), Lakoff (2008) and Perloff (2014) and many others.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The solution of the scientific task was preliminarily prepared in our article devoted to the communicative element in the activity of Russian political parties in the early XX and the early XXI centuries (Baltovskij and Belous, 2013). In the present study, the topic is determining the elements of the new cultural reality by the example of the changes of political conscience in Russia. The object of the research is the political text and its basic cause-and-effect determinants-political contemplation and political discourse. The methodological basis for the analysis is philosophical comparative linguistics. As an epistemological tool, we

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used the notions of the modern-day political science including the relevant applied research in the sphere of political contemplation and political discourse.

**The main part:** Political science literally means “a word on politics”. From this viewpoint, the political science contemplates the power of the word itself and, at the same time, the everlasting hunger to become a master of words. The only meaningful matter for a political scientist is one’s word; the combination of words forms the realm of the political text (Johnson-Cartée, 2005). This means that a political scientist (this term is a collective one, as including both the scientists and the politicians) creates political texts, which becomes not only their inner urge but also a social obligation.

The process of creating a political text incorporates two important aspects-political contemplation and political discourse (Laver *et al.*, 2003). Contemplation means self-actualization of an individual. Political contemplation is structured so that the applied function of the political science-the power of a human over words-becomes dominant. Political contemplation is such an organization of the discourse realm that satisfies the human need for self-actualization and meaningful existence in the society by means of words. A text is always the result of contemplation; it registers the changes in the society that are the essence of the politics (Hart *et al.*, 2006).

In this case, speaking of political contemplation, we mean the initial psychological identification of individuals with the society; it is based on the contemplation of the unity of own interests and a certain subjective political identity as referred to the society (Joseph, 2006). In other words, we suppose that a political text is not necessarily conditioned by a well-shaped form of theoretical contemplation, but can as well be aimed at applied tasks of individual self-actualization. A political text is such a reflection of ideological views that connects an individual and the circumstances. The political “matrix” is not only and not as much an abstract though structured combination of words (symbols), but, mainly, an applied dimension of human mind that registers objective changes in the outside world and conveys information to other minds (Edelman, 1985).

Thus, for an individual, the discourse is a universal and, at the same time, a truly “applied” method of interacting with the world. It is only due to the discourse that “humana biologicum” (a biological individual) becomes “humana politicum” (a political individual). The most important applied meaning of a political text is in keeping high discourse dynamics. In this sense, functioning of such texts in the society is a clear token of democracy. It is difficult to think of a political text that is not an act of communication, i.e., the one having a direct addressee and be comprehended

by particular audience. Or, rather, one can think of such a text, but it can hardly be called a “political” one.

A political text exists within its historical time. It connects minds by meanings; it directs and stimulates an individual for certain actions. Therefore, each historical era corresponds to its own political texts. By comparing them, we can determine, which way the history of Russia is moving. Comparing the present-day Russia with that a hundred years ago seems representative and interesting. In the Russian reality of the early XX century (1905-1917), which was considered as the crisis by contemporary people, in the particular conditions of acute ideological contradictions and parties propaganda, the political text executed its applied function through newspaper articles and, in a certain sense, it forms the society’s political views. The public character of political activity, which was new at the time, meant that the corresponding political texts will be directed not towards a relatively small group of followers, but towards a pretty wide group of citizens regarding themselves as “electorate”.

The function of ideological and literary articulation was executed by leaders of public groups and political parties. Political struggle in Russia during the early XX century demanded that the political elite could give literary shape to political trends. It is noteworthy many persons in the political opposition in Russia of that time also regarded themselves as professional writers (Baltovskij, 2009). A large part of politicians of that time regarded political text not as a subjective private opinion, but as an objective truth that is to be accepted by most people. That is why well-spread political texts were directly connected to the so-called “party affiliation” principle (Bocheński, 1964; Ignatow, 1988).

A hundred years later, in the early XXI century, the world and Russia changed radically. The culture of the country, as well as its politics became dominated by new critical circumstances. The main feature of the present-day culture crisis is the life that cycles around consumption again and again. Despite the fact that de-ideologization has become a global tendency, post-modernism as a dominant way of thinking prevents political conscience from going outside the ideological discourse that lost a lot of relevance, but recreates the ideas of the past in more and more new combinations.

The present-day crisis of culture invariably causes the crisis of the political word. Whereas in the recent past the public speech was limited by moral or even criminal responsibility, nowadays the word no longer has ideological or normative liability. Instead of the theoretically charged word of the past, there are now some substitutes-symbols belonging to mythological way of thinking conscience. The modern collective conscience shows a gap between the everyday and the political thinking. Profane thinking dissolves the theoretical norms under the political text; as a result, the

norm has lost its constituting role and become an object of manipulation.

The modern ideology is formed not by writers known to everybody in the country but by anonymous political strategists (that is why it is naive to relate the means of political utterance to the “official language of the authorities”) (Belous, 2011). The very marking of political activity (“political science”) is nowadays associated either with serving the authorities’ needs or with self-actualization of some or other media person. The “party affiliation” of the political text is no longer mentioned by anybody. The entire ideological range is divided into “our guys” and “bad guys”. For Russia, an obvious example of the political text losing its power is the so-called “new thinking” declared by M.S. Gorbachev in late XX century—a clear evidence of how the power of the political word is depleted, how the communist rhetoric of the past that had seemed unshakable for the soviet mind, is dissolved overnight, but is replaced not by a changed way of thinking but by repeating meaningless old clichés (Woodby and Evans, 1990).

The main particular feature of modern political texts is that a large part of them exist on the Internet. As for the subjective base of the modern politics, the range of the political texts proper (those written by politicians, on their behalf or anonymously) is markedly narrowed, whereas politics-related texts, i.e., the texts inspired by the political situation and written by bloggers, are quickly becoming more and more numerous, thus extending the range of politics (Thin *et al.*, 2010). The political text nowadays uses new terminology, particularly, the word “network”. However, many of those who use this term have no idea of its meaning or consequences. A person entering that “network” become not the author of the text, but its user- avatar. That user may not have been programmed yet, but is already a part of the general program—a necessary element of its implementation. The modern texts (which are numerous on the Internet) mark the change but do not explain it, do not indicate further changes and, therefore do not relate to communicative and applied tasks of explaining and educating.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

A bright example of post-modernist visualization of the political text in modern Russia is the project “Citizen Poet” –a prominent cultural and political event in Russia today. It is one of the first successful political shows on the Internet, which is the asylum of the political and cultural underground in Russia today, a source of socially-conscious journalism that is an alternative to the majority of the official electronic and printed mass-media. The title of the project relates to one of the best examples of socially-related poetry by N.A. Nekrasov: “Poet and Citizen” (1855-1856), where

the essence is manifested in two favorite verses: “You needn’t necessarily be a poet, but you must behave like a citizen”. Obviously, the authors of the “Citizen Poet” meant to cause it to mobilize Russian intelligentsia so that the intelligentsia openly expresses their social position towards the authorities.

The content of the project “Citizen Poet” is highly eclectic: it uses quite a variety of literary styles and genres. They caricature the soviet official poet S. Mikhalkov and an emigrant I. Brodsky, poetry for children by A. Barto and modern serious poetry by A. Voznesensky. The program can be described as “tawdry” post-modernism labeling the reality with clichés about Russia and the Russians: open-heartedness, loud parties, drinking, vodka, bears, wild character etc. It is no coincidence that the only official sponsor of the project is the vodka-producing brand “Volodya and Bears”, whose symbols are always on the screen during the program. The post-modernist character of the project is not denied by its participants themselves.

A bright example of the mass-culture, “Citizen Poet”, nevertheless, solved an important cultural-political task of eliminating taboos from the Russian political discourse. Putin, FSB, President’s administration etc. are no longer “sacred cows” for satire and public shows. However, even though it was started as an original cultural-political project, “Citizen Poet” very quickly turned into a show depending on ratings, number of views, likes and comments on the Internet etc., rather than on the content and quality of presentation. This project joined a wide range of modern-day Russian protest trend: Shnurov, Vasya Oblomov, Xenia Sobchiak, Parfenov etc., who are entirely media figures and carry no deep political content. As a result, “Citizen Poet”, despite the obvious talent of its inspirers and participants, failed to create a real intellectual alternative and remained post-modernist criticism for the sake of criticism. During the epoch when the culture itself turns from the object of creation into a consumer utility, the satire aimed at mass comprehension becomes a piece of merchandise (Street, 2011).

Nevertheless, satire in Russia will have a long life. The political satire is especially topical during the times of crisis and reform. When the historical process itself demands satire, literature provides an offer immediately so a lot of talented and gift less writers spring up. The objects of mocking are the bureaucracy with unlimited power who hides under the façade of the state.

In the political text, a word is an indicator of the strength. A weak and meaningless word denotes low strength. A word spoken by a modern politician is not at all like that spoken by an ancient philosopher or a scientist-writer-politician of the early XX century who cared, first of all about the sense and, therefore, about the discourse. It is obvious that the word that used to be

sacred, is now profaned and irrelevant (Feldman and Warfield, 2010). When it is deprived of spiritual meaning, the political word is no longer in demand; meaning is drained to nothing; the sound of the past meaning turns into the silence of the present symbol. It is no coincidence that the political philosophy of the early XXI century sets the question of the “meaningless word” of the present-day politics, or of empty rhetoric of modern political texts (Rancière, 2004).

A limitless expansion of the modern political text, its existence not inside, but near politics, sets the question of the political criteria. It is all about distinguishing between the “political” and “non-political”, i.e., we need to select such a text that connects the present with the future. Whereas if we go outside the topics of the day and the current needs (meaning), this degrades the political text into a non-political, basically, something forced, dictating certain standards of behavior, primitive in its “party affiliation” and therefore boring (Morris, 2001).

Today, the Russian people are for the first time facing such a crisis of culture that has no perspective whatsoever, or a way out, or a progress. It is high time we have contemplated the future of the political text in hope that this may help the political elite of Russia to keep from degrading into empty talks, thus destroying the discourse and dialogue (Elwood, 2009). As the main criteria of the modern political text, the following characteristics should be taken:

- The topicality (meaning that the political text is up-to-date) always lives with its own time.
- Political texts have to be meaningful even in the modern circumstances, when there is less and less thought with the vacuum filled with the absurd. The political meaning of the text, if it has any applied character, is like a magnifying glass that demonstrates pointlessness of empty talks most obviously. It is the meaning that gives the text the time dimension: brings it outside of the present moment and fills it with history.
- The political text is always personified and includes the purpose. It’s “what” is always created for some or other “why”. The answer to that “why” is always in the sphere of applied political discourse; in other words, the political text is always addressed to everyone but is only comprehended by few people, which often happens post factum (Perloff, 2014).

### CONCLUSION

- Modern culture exists in the conditions of the crisis. This fact has an immediate impact upon the process of functioning of a political text in the society. Today, a political text is a product of de-

ideologization. This process is still more obvious if we compare the beginning of the previous century (when high ideals were dominant) and post-modernist modern time.

- A most important consequence of the change in the relationships between the culture and politics is the emergence of a principally new subject of the modern political life. It is an individual existing as an author of a political text on the Internet only as a user-avatar. Communicative relationships between such author and the addressees of a political text have also been dramatically changed: each person can communicate with any other. However, such communication often reminds of a famous formula by Gobbes “Bellum omnium contra omnes” (“War of everyone against everyone”).
- The notion of the “political text” needs renovation and applied implementation. The strive of the modern post-modernism to absolutize the external shape of the word (symbol) and diminish the meaning, prevents us from getting out of the crisis, if we speak of Russia. Possibly, there is another task before the scientists: return the dimension of meaning to the political word, as well as to the political text.

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