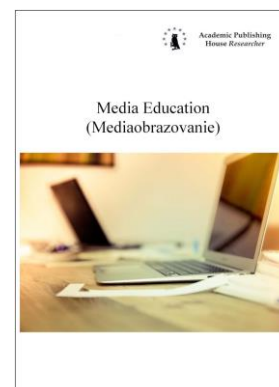




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## Humiliation in Media: Linguolegal Parameters

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### Abstract

Modern media discourse is largely focused on downgraded speech registers, manifested in jargon, increased negative emotionality and conflictogenicity of used language means. The article suggests combining the most significant destructions with one concept of "humiliation". Even in classical rhetoric it was understood an unreasonable therefore erroneous downgrading in style. Many manifestations of humiliation are typical for media discourse. The article on the material of current media texts of 2021 discusses the humiliation types connected with the choice of some language units, as well as with the use of destructive speech strategies not corresponding to ethical and speech and linguolegal standards. Humiliation manifested in the very choice of the topic, the object of discussion and speech strategies, is analyzed on news stories about the "Skopinsky maniac" return. The main ways to counteract the abuse of speech freedom and the right to information are to increase the level of public legal awareness, consciously improve the mechanisms of self-regulation in the media. The methodological basis of the study of humiliation in media is the multidimensional representation of the language system and its subsystems. The authors used the method of semantic and modal explication of speech acts with cumulative elements, the linguopragmatic and linguolegal analysis method, the contextual interpretation method.

**Keywords:** ethical and linguistic standards, humiliation, insult, communicative conflict, legal linguistics, media discourse, speech strategy.

### 1. Introduction

The modern media discourse characteristics are formed by a number of factors and, first of all, by the freedom from censorship guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation. This defined the new role of mass media as an institution of democracy, ensuring the free exchange of opinions, the ideological diversity of the emerging civil society. It goes without saying, the costs will be the abuse of freedom of speech and information, destructive processes in media discourse and verbal crimes (slander, defamation, insult).

One of the main destructions in modern media can be referred to humiliation (from Latin *humilis* 'low'). In rhetoric, humiliation is defined as an unreasonable downgrading in style, which can be interpreted as a rhetorical mistake (Khazagerov, 2009 : 396). In a similar sense, the Greek term *tapinosis* is used (ταπεινωσις – platitude, vulgarity from Greek ταπεινοῦς – low). "Levelling down", jargonization, lumpenization of the media language can hardly be attributed to the reasonable characteristics of media discourse.

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## 2. Materials and methods

The methodological basis of the study of humiliation in media text/media discourse is the principles of comprehensive and integrated representation of the language system and its subsystems. The authors used the method of semantic and modal explication of speech acts with cumulative elements, the linguopragmatic and linguolegal analysis method, as well as the contextual interpretation method.

## 3. Discussion

The public style taste caused by the democratization of all the aspects of life determines an unprecedented balance of different speech layers in the media language (Baek et al., 2019; Boulianne, 2019; Lehmann et al., 2017; Scharkow, Bachl, 2017). The predominance of speech elements from the downgraded language registers in media has long been recorded by researchers (Kudinova, 2011; Kulikova, Brusenskaya, 2019; Redkozubova, 2014 and many others). These language elements aim is to get as close as possible to the reader/listener level, that is, the mass culture consumer (Sengul, 2019; Tandoc et al., 2018). Also they shape public taste (Baccarella et al., 2018; Hoffmann, Suphan, 2017; Temmerman et al., 2019; Van Duyn, Collier, 2019), dictate the canon renewal, since for many native speakers, media is the most important speech environment, far from the high book culture. "... slang knowledge helps in all the situations look an understanding, involved person, and therefore worthy of respect and interest» (Moskovtsev, Shevchenko, 2009: 28). It must be admitted that the terms "slang" and "jargon" have no significant difference, but they have different pragmatics. It is neutral in the first case and pejorative in the second one.

It is typical that three Dictionary editions of Buzzwords (Novikov, 2005; 2008; 2016) are more than half composed of substandard units such as slangy expressions, colloquial, sometimes roughly colloquial words. It is amazing that, even serious analytical texts cannot be composed without units of downgraded registers today.

A pun has become the usual technique, when the common language meaning and the jargon one of the same sign collide, for example:

The title: *Laundering will be added to housing and utilities bills.*

The lead: *Wet cleaning in the entrances threatens a new rise in the price of "communal services" (Rostovskiy, 2021).*

The title is intended to evoke the expression "money laundering" (in another case, the word "laundering" would be inappropriate).

*Scientists decide the fate of scientists – and this turned out to be outside the traditions of modern Russian administration, where every school teacher has two "smotryashchie" ("lookouts") from all the sorts of local education authorities (Terentyev, 2021)*

According to *Wikipedia*, the "lookout" (*smotryashchii*) in thieves' jargon is a criminal authority, empowered to solve important problems in criminal cases, responsible for the situation in certain areas of the city, as well as in prisons: in cells, in prison camps, in detachments. The jargon unit in the article on education perfectly expresses the negative attitude to the countless controlling agents and inspectors of the school process.

According to researchers the jargon meanings of common words often dominate in the language consciousness, which is reflected in explanations such as *Father was an authority for me (in the good sense of this word)*. This situation was largely formed due to media, which popularized criminal and other jargons. Many language units from these areas "rose in rank". Now they are perceived as words of the common colloquial language: *bespredel (lawlessness), otmorozok (scumbag), kinut' (throw), kidok (fooling around), raspilit' (saw), raspil (sawing)*, etc.).

On one hand, it is true that using jargon, journalists commit verbal aggression to the addressee. Thus, the mass media consumer obediently turns into a sympathizer to criminal elements and perceives their subculture, and on the other hand, a reader and a viewer show interest in similar content (Golan et al., 2019; Jang, Kim, 2018; Strover et al., 2019), and the journalist in these cases performs a kind of order.

Despite the strict ban imposed on the drug addiction promotion (Brusenskaya, Kulikova, 2018; Lane, 2020), it is quite usual for media to discuss drug addiction in detail, drug intoxication condition, with the drug-related jargon use:

*Drug addicts are complicated people. They can start shnyryat'sya (using drugs) at any time. ... Vladka already used intoxicating substances. As the drug addicts say, he dergal*

*nervyachok (was pulling nerve). ... He constantly smoked travka (weed) with his friends such as rapper Decl and Masha Rzhevskaya from the "Factory of Stars". ... No matter how we came to Zorin's office, there was always a terrible kumar (smoke). ... She helped him to get out of the drug bodun (hangover) (Sazykina, 2021).*

Such media texts make it possible to speak of the "Russian speech narcotization" (Redkina, 2010: 6-13), when the drug topic appears as the quite ordinary one, which, of course, has its negative consequences.

The media language jargonization was clearly considered to be the humiliation sign before, but today it is hardly possible to unambiguously evaluate it in this way. It goes without saying that young people being a generational society actively use jargon: "... a representative of student society, competently using slang resources, successfully presents him/herself to others as a person with proper and modern thinking and language» (Belonozhkin, 2010: 15). Therefore, today according to modern methods of teaching Russian as a foreign language it is important to teach foreign students for their successful adaptation jargon units of speech, to expand educational dictionaries including jargon lexis and even to create special dictionaries of jargon lexis for foreigners (Rudenyak, 2017; Wang Xinhua, 2020).

The processes typical for Russian linguoculture correlate with global trends (Sutherland et al., 2018). The scope of the substandard use is expanding, scientists fix the communicative expansion of slang. It is possible to talk about its increasing impact on the normative sphere (Brusenskaya, Kulikova, 2018; Roth-Gordon, 2002; Redkozubova, 2014; Tandoc et al., 2019, Mitchell, 2017, etc.).

Many manifestations of humiliation are typical for media discourse. This is a decline in interpersonal tolerance, inevitable after the rigid directive and autocratic style of communication became a sign of the past. For example, forms of pejorative evaluation in media discourse applied to representatives of power structures:

*The title Reformatorka (reformer – female) in glamour.*

The lead *Medicine optimization: doctors are without money, Golikova is in diamonds* (Remneva, 2021) – It is about Deputy Prime Minister T. Golikova.

*But the head of the Central Bank, Elvira Sakhizadovna Nabiullina, calmed me down with a kind word, actually healing my emotional wounds: it turns out that we should be grateful to our compatriots exporting our money abroad. Sakhizadovna said that the Russians, stayed at home because of the pandemic, did not spend 2 trillion rubles on foreign trips, but began to spend them here, increasing demand and raising prices. "That is why food inflation accelerated to 7.7 % in 12 months, and the government had to regulate the prices of sugar, sunflower oil, chicken meat and eggs." However, they are as the same regulators as the head of the Central Bank Nabiullina.*

*In general, what did Elvira Sakhizadovna graduate from? Where is this taught? Only the withdrawal of our money abroad saves our loaf of bread, doesn't it? And we are still able to buy it, aren't we? ... That is, glory to the oligarchs who withdraw our money? Should they be given the title of Heroes of Russia?*

*And after that, have you got any questions who will be the Nobel Prize Winner in Economics in 2021?*

*In general, I am outraged that my compatriots began to buy potatoes and beets for these not spent in Turkish resorts and casinos in Las Vegas trillions, creating an agiotage demand and pushing prices into the sky. ... Curb your appetites, failed foreign holiday-makers! Give the vinaigrette a taste! (Serafimova, 2021).*

The author's position is quite fair and can be supported by many parameters. However, calling the head of the Central Bank only by her patronymic – Sakhizadovna – is, of course, the violation of ethical and linguistic standards, the demonstrative manifestation of disrespect, and this technique does not add points to the author in the dispute. It is highly incorrect to achieve a comic effect, using onyms.

According to Article 5.61 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation (Administrative Code of the Russian Federation), the indecent form of the word is very significant and takes the main place in classification of different forms of insult. In our opinion implicit forms of insult are the examples of this case as well.

Insult is supposed to be the frequent verbal crime. In this case, the linguoculturological information related to the tradition of using the Russian patronymic without a name should be involved.

All these manifestations of the humiliation in media texts concerned some language elements. However, humiliation can be connected with the very choice of the topic, the object of discussion and speech strategies.

We analyzed this on the media texts attracted a great reader and viewer attention. It is the interview with the "Skopinsky maniac".

Former presidential candidate K. Sobchak interviews V. Mokhov, who served 17 years in prison for the terrible crime: for four years he was keeping two abducted underage girls in the basement, tortured and raped them. K. Sobchak and supporting her K. Bogomolov refers to the American service Netflix, broadcasting documentary series about criminals, to world-famous film masterpieces about maniacs (such as "The Silence of the Lambs", "Seven", etc.), they attribute their interest in the "Skopinsky maniac" (it happened in the city of Skopin, Ryazan Region) to the desire to "explore evil". In 2020, a film by A. Sulim about the Angara maniac Popkov released on the channel "Editorial Board" is the precedent. Netflix's stories are related to long-standing crimes, their defendants are either serving a life sentence or executed.

The film about the Angara maniac is made in form of investigation. Work on the film went on for several years: the case materials, archives were studied, and an analysis of events was obtained, where the main narrator is an investigator, and comments are given by police officers involved in the Popkov case. It goes without saying, nobody makes an hour and a half of broadcast time to the maniac in this film. It must be admitted that the Angara maniac was sentenced to life in prison, that is, he is not dangerous to society in general and to his former victims in particular.

Opponents of the interview are quite right in their opinion according to which making a *YouTube* star out of a prison-serving sadist does not mean "exploring the essence of evil", especially since Sobchak makes public the disgusting details of violence. K. Sobchak is interested in his sexual capabilities and preferences. She asks the maniac about sex with children as if it is something usual.

She is very interested in whether Mokhov can really have sex three times a day (asks several times and comments: "Not everyone can do this"). Sobchak said about the basement where he had kept the captives: "It's a real bunker here", which sounds like a praise "Well done!" (he spent three years building the future prison). It is the humanization of the monster, and the idea "you can become famous for inhumane actions, a terrible crime" is introduced into the recipient consciousness. No wonder State Duma Deputy A. Gorelkin sent a request to the Ministry of Internal Affairs to evaluate whether the interview with the "Skopinsky maniac" could provoke a surge in violence in the country.

One of the victims of the rapist announced that she was going to appeal to the prosecutor's office with a demand to make a criminal case against Mokhov. In the interview he claimed that he was going to deal with her. Psychologists professionally working with victims of violence recommend not to use the word "victim". More often they use the linguistic calque from the English language "survivor". For the survivor, re-traumatization is terrible, when a person finds himself in conditions resembling a traumatic situation.

But some people believe that such interviews may exist, because people should know that maniacs outwardly look like ordinary people. But much more people were outraged and horrified by everything that happened with the voluntary or involuntary rehabilitation of a criminal. It is immoral to make a scandalous show out of the tragedy of minors. It was outrage that the interviewer relished the details of pedophilia, and called violence just sex. The interview gave V. Mokhov a sense of stardom. The triumph was brought to him by the monstrous crime, which he doesn't consider a crime (As he says, he stumbled a little, this could happen to anyone).

O. Pushkina, Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Family, Women and Children, appealed to the Prosecutor General's Office and the Federal Penitentiary Service with a request to give a legal evaluation of what happened (she was especially outraged by the criminal's statement about his intention to "deal" with one of the former captives again) and spoke about the initiation of a law on the protection of victims of crime from contacts with convicted rapists.

The Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation took this situation for consideration: the Chairman of the Investigative Committee, A. Bastrykin, instructed to check the interview episodes in order to give them a proper legal evaluation.

It is a well-known fact that popular characters in show tabloids like *Let Them Talk* almost always are paid, and the information (which, however, is refuted by Sobchak) that Mokhov received a fee for the interview, caused particular outrage.

#### 4. Results

Many journalists, writers, and public figures accused K. Sobchak of chasing hype and violating journalistic ethics. There were calls to legally prohibit former prisoners from giving interviews (Head of the Union of Journalists of the Russian Federation V. Solovyov, first Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Information Policy, Information Technologies and Communications S. Boyarsky, etc.), in order to avoid making objects of commercial interest in the media community of the persons committed terrible crimes.

Speaking to the "Skopinsky maniac" on equal terms, K. Sobchak emphasizes the importance of his person, legalizes evil, makes it possible to re-traumatize the victims. Such a maniac should be the object of interest only to psychiatrists.

In recent years, lawyers defending the interests of Russian victims of violence have begun to file complaints with the European Court of Human Rights about the re-traumatization of girls during the investigation and trial, when they are forced to repeat the same thing and relive the violence (despite the fact that it is detrimental to their psyche). Of course, this is done in the interests of justice, but nevertheless it is an important question how to avoid re-traumatization of the victims. In the case of the Sobchak interview, this re-traumatization is needlessly artificially constructed. According to elementary ethics it is necessary to correlate the public interest in information with the interests of the victims.

Interviewing a rapist gives him a public platform which he can use to threaten the victims. This is the danger of such an interview. This is exactly what happened in the analyzed case, and V. Mokhov's statements, of course, should be checked for evidence of a crime by law enforcement agencies.

According to foreign practice of covering such stories the names of convicted and released criminals are not mentioned, even after several decades after the crime.

Anonymity is maintained to avoid the popularization and the heroization of the criminal. The main principle of ethical broadcasting in such cases is to exclude negative consequences. But neither victims nor the "Skopinsky maniac" are anonymous: their names are known to anyone.

K. Sobchak was not the first of the journalists who spoke with Mokhov: some media published dialogues with him, as well as news telegram channels; new interviews appeared. For example, in the newspaper *Moscow Komsomol Member* from March 31-April 6, 2021 the interview by L. Speranskiy was titled "Face of the Beast" (Speranskiy, 2021). In the interview with K. Sobchak, V. Mokhov said that "the increased attention of journalists was good" for him, he has something to be proud of: at the exit from the colony, he was "met by fifteen cars" with potential interviewers.

The film by K. Sobchak had the greatest resonance, proposals to ban interviews with criminals convicted of murder or rape appeared after it. But it is not so easy to do: after serving the sentence this person is the same citizen as the others and has all the civil rights, and therefore has the right to communicate with journalists. And it depends on the journalist in what way and with what focus this communication will be carried out. It is ideal if the perlocative effect is to prevent other people from committing crimes, and it is scary if this communication gives rise to followers.

The journalist M. Rostovsky, in the article with the ironic title "How to neutralize the "honoured maniacs of the Russian Federation" published in the newspaper *Moscow Komsomol Member* writes: "The money rain that our TV brought down on Mokhov made the criminal a very wealthy man by the standards of the Russian province" (Rostovskiy, 2021).

In the United States, there is the "Son of Sam law" (as the serial killer A. Berkowitz called himself), according to which criminals, even served their sentences, are prohibited from receiving income from memoirs, films and so on related to their crimes throughout their lives: such income is either confiscated by the state authorities, or paid as compensation to the relatives of victims.

#### 5. Conclusion

The law does not prohibit criminals from speaking out in media, but deprives them of the income from such statements. Through the complete ban to return to the situation in the USSR, when the public did not know anything about maniacs at all (and the feeling that there was no phenomenon at all), it is hardly correct, but restrictions, of course, are necessary.

During the discussion of the "Skopinsky maniac", attention was drawn to an important aspect of the problem: viewers (including federal channels) trained for so many years on TV shows, where family squabbles and all the sorts of human vices were shown, now "are ready for Mokhov":

no wonder that during a month and a half Sobchak's creation was watched by at least one and a half million people.

Prohibitions that seem necessary cannot change the linguocultural situation. But it can be regulated not only and not so much with the support of state authorities. This situation can be corrected if journalists, preparing their materials, uphold the ethical and linguistic, linguolegal standards adopted in their professional community.

Thus, the media discourse is characterized by various forms of humiliation such as unreasonable downgrading in style, language, and speech strategies. The main ways to counteract the abuse of freedom of speech and the right to information are to increase the level of public legal awareness, to consciously improve the mechanisms of self-regulation in media.

The demonstration of negative emotions and expressions, becoming not only frequent, but also typical for the media text/media discourse, as well as the cultivation of grassroots manifestations of culture and subculture, negatively affects society and creates prerequisites for negative behaviour. Meanwhile, the principle "do no harm" is as relevant for media as for medicine. The modern person is formed in modern media culture. Media space according to modern principles of language ecology should be focused on tolerant verbal communication and universal ethics.

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