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ЛИНГВОКУЛЬТУРОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ
ПОЛИМОДАЛЬНЫХ МАЛОФОРМАТНЫХ ТЕКСТОВ (НА ПРИМЕРЕ
АНГЛИЙСКОГО ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОГО ПЛАКАТА)

Аннотация. *В статье рассматриваются культурные особенности Великобритании через призму полимодальных текстов, а именно плакатов противоборствующих партий. Настоящая статья наглядно демонстрирует, что при создании политических плакатов задействованы различные семиотические ресурсы для выражения идеологических позиций с учетом национальных черт.*

Ключевые слова: *полимодальность, модус, модальная совместимость, политическая коммуникация, политические партии, выборы, плакат*

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LINGUOCULTUROLOGICAL FEATURES OF POLYMODAL
SHORT-FORM TEXTS (A CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH POLITICAL
POSTERS)

Abstract. *The article examines the cultural specificities of Great Britain through the prism of polymodal texts, particularly posters of opposing political parties. This study clearly demonstrates that the creation of political posters*

involves various semiotic resources to convey ideological stances while incorporating national characteristics.

Keywords: *polymodality, mode, modal compatibility, political communication, political parties, elections, poster.*

In recent years communication has become increasingly visually oriented. More and more frequently media combines visual and verbal elements to render a certain meaning and attract attention of the audience more effectively. This ongoing transition and scientific interest towards it has led to the development of a multimodal approach in analysing means of communication, texts, and discourse in general.

Linguists, who laid the foundation for the study of multimodality like M. Halliday and his followers, aimed to challenge the traditional ‘monomodality’ with its main focus on verbal aspects [Ирисханова 2016]. Therefore, modes as the core notion of the theory of multimodality were introduced. Gunther Kress defines a mode as “a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for creating a meaning” [Kress 2010]. The following types of modes are identified: verbal (or linguistic), visual, auditory, kinetic (or gestural) and spatial.

Texts that incorporate two or more modes are considered multimodal. Political discourse abounds in multimodal texts of different genres such as political ads, leaflets, stickers, banners and billboards.

In this article we would like to focus on political poster. These texts usually creatively modify verbal component through engaging prominent spatial and colour solutions or combine it with graphic images. Posters play a crucial role in political communication. They are used during meetings, picketing, demonstrations, and political campaigns. The message is targeted at the widest possible audience, hence, tends to be unambiguous in meaning and concise. Furthermore, to reinforce the idea and draw attention to their work creators use persuasive communication strategies that are directed towards inducing emotional response in the recipient [Павлина 2019].

One of the principles of employing a certain mode or a combination of modes in the process of communication is *modal affordance*. This term refers to the appropriateness of a mode for meaning-making, its potential in the context of the situation, as well as constraints or limitations. The assertion of the scope of affordance of different modes is based on cultural and individual experiences of a sign maker. Thus, it is impossible to fully comprehend the choice behind semiotic resources without considering the cultural background and unique life experiences of a person [Bezemer 2024]. Multimodal texts are rooted in a particular cultural and historical context, with each mode drawing on social, political, and cultural references to create the meaning that resonates with the audience that shares common cultural background [Павлина 2020].

We will look into the interplay of verbal and visual modes in posters of the biggest political parties in the UK, Conservative (or Tory) and Labour, focusing on manifestation of cultural traits characteristic of British people.



Figure 1. Saatchi & Saatchi “Labour’s Policy on Arms” poster (1987)

The first poster we will consider was created by Saatchi & Saatchi advertising agency for the Conservative party at the time of the 1987 general election in the UK. The poster criticises the Labour party for its proposition to abolish nuclear weapons in 1987 manifesto [1987 Labour Party Manifesto]. The verbal element consists of the phrase “*Labour’s policy on arms*” in large bold font with a full stop at the end. The full stop is not often used on posters, and its use here is most likely intentional. It asserts firmness and determination. There is an inscription at the bottom with the name of the party in blue and a square with

a cross in it, resembling a checked box on a voting bulletin, which urges the recipient to give their vote for the Tories. Blue is the only speck of colour on the poster, and it is strongly associated with the party. Under the inscription we can see a slogan “*The next move forward*”, that indicates the Conservatives have another solution to the problem in favour of the country’s prosperity. All the text on the poster is capitalised. The visual aspect is a photo of a man in the uniform of the British army with a frightened expression on his face, mouth ajar, and his hands in the air. This combination is not devoid of humour: the attack on the Labour’s policy is based on a pun (‘*arms*’ as in armaments and as a body part). Moreover, it is ironic, implying that abolishing nuclear weapons is equal to surrendering altogether and that Labour’s policy on arms represents just that. Irony and puns are typical for British humour and that fact manifests itself in the analysed multimodal complex through an interaction of verbal and visual elements.



Figure 2. “*Be afraid. Be very afraid*” poster by T. Beattie (2001)

The next piece was designed by Trevor Beattie for the Labour party for the 2001 general election. The party was in office at that time and needed to strengthen its presence. The visuals in the poster instantly grab attention due to their absurdity and eccentricity. It is an edited photo of William Hague, who was the leader of the Conservative party during this period, with Margaret Thatcher’s signature hairstyle and earrings. The linguistic aspect includes two sentences “*Be afraid. Be very afraid.*” As mentioned before, the use of a full stop might indicate firmness and finality of the message. Supposedly this combination of modes

entails that, even though Conservatives gained ‘a new face,’ their faulty policies did not change. Through this poster the Labour Party traces and highlights the opposing party’s stagnation. This stagnation or fear of change as another characteristic trait of British culture has two sides because it can be interpreted as consistency and following traditions by the Tory supporters. A more graphic expression of the following traditions can be seen on the same poster next to the impelling inscription “*Vote Labour*”. It is the use of colour red in the rose, Labour’s emblem. The colour has long been associated with the socialist movement and labour unions. It is linked to the May Day marches established by the Second International in 1889, where participants wore red flowers [Sawer 2007]. Choosing this particular colour and election symbol pays tribute to the long-standing history and tradition of what they represent.

The selection showcases the clash of the political parties and ideologies as both posters intend to discredit the opposing party. The tactics the authors of these posters employ in this unapologetic struggle for power, being undeniably an integral part of political communication between opponents, can also indicate British competitiveness. As seen in their achievements in various sports from football and rugby to tennis and cricket, the spirit of rivalry and desire to win are a prominent trait of the British culture [Луговский 2020]. By voting, people express their affiliation to this or that political party and, to a certain extent, their agreement with the party’s advertising strategy. Therefore, the competitive nature of the considered multimodal texts proposes a wider national disposition.

In conclusion, multimodal texts can serve as cultural mirrors that reflect core aspects of the identity of a nation. Through the deliberate interplay of verbal and visual modes, the examined multimodal complexes harness traditionalism, competitiveness, and peculiar types of humour (irony, wit, absurd) — traits deeply embedded in British culture. The rhetorical strategies employed are not merely persuasive techniques, they are shaped by and directed toward a culturally informed audience, one that recognises and responds to familiar codes of humour,

symbolism, and rivalry. Thus, political posters in the UK are not only instruments of ideological confrontation, but also culturally rich artefacts that reveal how national character is both constructed and communicated through political discourse. Multimodality, in turn, allows for more intricate utilisation of cultural context in shaping political messages.

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