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### TWO DAYS IN THE LIFE OF LEADERS: WORLD-MODELLING POTENTIAL OF POLITICAL EVENT

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#### *Abstract*

The article deals with the analysis of representation of a political event – the 2017 G20 summit in American, British, and Australian media. It is argued that the political event described in the texts of mass communication represents a discourse world, or a dynamic system of meanings that is created by journalists and interpreted by readers under the influence of a wide range of extra-linguistic factors. World-modelling potential of the political event is studied in close connection with the notion of discourse world as a conceptual representational structure of discourse, emerging around one of the major political and economic events of the past year in the totality of texts, united by the theme of summit. Discourse world of the discussed political event serves as background, against which the concept LEADER is foregrounded. The discourse-acquired characteristics of the concept are systematized. The world-modelling potential of the political event is realized as representation of the relationship between leaders-participants of the summit. It draws on relevant fragments of the context that specify frames, organized around the concept LEADER in American, British and Australian media communication. It is proved that the creation of a unique focus of the frame depends on the ideological vision of the political event by the agents of discourse.

*Keywords:* world-modelling potential, media discourse, representational structure of discourse, frame, political event, summit G20

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The role of the media in the world

In the era of digitalization the role of the media as "the fourth power" is enhanced. Not only do mass media control information flows, but they also direct the construal of reality in the minds of people. They affect deep layers of human understanding of the world exerting influence on mental structures. They govern the perception of political and social events of global importance and manage the opinions and attitudes of the public. Scholars worldwide find it necessary to analyze media discourse and linguistic mechanisms of representation of political events that have strong impact on the global community (Budaev & Chudinov, 2017; Koshkarova & Ruzhentseva, 2016; Voroshilova & Solopova, 2017). Some of them point out that linguistic representations of different conceptual complexity determine the way people think about situations or events (Matczak, 2013; Gavins & Lahey, 2016), and we share this point of view.

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## **1.2. G20 Summit as political event of global importance**

The summit of "The group of twenty" (G20) was one of the central political events in the past year. The Leaders of the G20 met in Hamburg (Germany) on 7–8 July 2017 to address global economic challenges and contribute to prosperity and well-being of the world. They discussed major financial and economic problems in the face of great challenges of our time – terrorism, migration, poverty, hunger, health threats, climate change, energy security, gender inequality. The primary concern of the participants was to master the challenges and work out suitable solutions to the problems raised.

## **2. Problem Statement**

### **2.1. Discourse world of a political event is biased**

Covering the 2017 G20 summit differs greatly in the media of the USA, the UK and Australia. To unravel the mechanisms of it, we treat the political event described in mass communication as a representational structure of discourse, that we call *discourse world of a political event*. It is a dynamic system of meanings created by journalists and interpreted by readers under the influence of a wide range of extra-linguistic factors. We argue that discourse world is biased. It reflects the power of framing information by the agents of discourse (journalists) and changes people's opinion of the key participant leaders according to the national interests of the country where the paper is published.

### **2.2. Discourse world of a political event possesses world-modelling potential**

Discourse-world of a political event is a context-dependent informational model of the discussed fragment of reality, created in an integrative set of media texts united by the theme of the G20 summit. In other words, media texts, organized around the political event in their totality, serve as bases of mental representations of different conceptual complexity, constituting a discourse world that conforms with political and economic ideology. Discourse world of a political event possesses *world-modelling potential*. We define it in terms of the ability of the agents of discourse to implement ideologically desirable and intentionally determined meanings and values in media text continuum that concentrates on the political event. Such a broad notion certainly needs to be more specific, thus, we pose the following research questions.

## **3. Research Questions**

Summit is defined as "a meeting at which the leaders of two or more countries discuss important matters" (Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's English Dictionary, 2008). Consequently, the focus of this type of the political event is on the interaction between the world-leaders that are supposed to collaborate to arrive at concrete decisions. The discourse world of the summit is seen as the background against which concept LEADER is foregrounded. Verbal semiotic resources are used in media texts to represent relevant fragments of the political context and demonstrate the relations between the leaders of the participant countries. Is there anything specific about it in different national media discourses? How is concept LEADER framed and modified in discourse world as presented in American, British, and Australian media communication?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to reveal the world-modelling potential of the summit in English-language mass media: we specifically try to single out the most conspicuous frames that constitute the structure of concept LEADER in order to find out, what discourse-acquired characteristics the concept has as a result of functioning in the media of three countries. The materials for the study are contexts taken from American, British and Australian newspapers in one day (the second day of the summit). The total number of contexts is 1,720 units. Under a context we mean a word, a word group, a sentence, or even several sentences forming a coherent syntactic unit.

## **5. Research Methods**

### **5.1. World-Modelling Theory**

The methodological framework of the paper forms *World-Modelling Theory*. It is a branch of discourse studies that integrates ideas of European and Russian philosophy, logic, cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis to explain the characteristics of mental and linguistic representations of reality in discourse for the purposes of communication (Kushneruk, 2016). The term *world-modelling* is used in the meaning “structuring information about reality reproduced in discourse, that leads to the formation of mental representations of varying degrees of conceptual complexity” (Kushneruk, 2017).

The named theory initially draws on Text-World Theory (Canning, 2017; Gavins, 2007; Hidalgo Downing, 2000; Ho et al., 2017; Matczak, 2013; Tincheva, 2013; Trimarco, 2015; Werth, 1999) as well as on theories emphasizing the importance of studying socio-ideological influence of discourse in terms of mental representations (Chilton, 2004; Van Dijk, 2006; World Interpretation in Language, 2017).

We argue that ideological ‘pictures of reality’ are constructed by ‘powerful’ agents (journalists, politicians, scholars, educators, etc.) who have access to discourse and model perspectives that structure and govern people’s perception of the described situations and events. Finding these perspectives as evidence of world-modelling is supposed to give insight into the discursive construction of political reality.

### **5.2. Discourse world and concept as mental structures**

World-Modelling Theory is an autonomous field of studying discourse in terms of representational structures, reflecting the dynamic processes and the results of mental and linguistic representation of information about the world in discourse, and their role in constructing social reality and knowledge system. The philosophical underpinning of World-Modelling Theory establishes that reality is not given us directly, but through mental representations, the totality of which constitute the reality in our minds. Under *representational structures* we mean text-driven mental constructs of different conceptual quality, projecting worlds that conform to the purposes of communication. The basic representational structures are *discourse world* and *text world*. Both are mental representations, activated in the minds of the recipients as they read/listen.

It was Paul Werth who introduced the notions of ‘discourse-world’ and ‘text-world’ to denote complex, rich, discourse-level mental representations. The idea was further developed by Gavins (Gavins, 2007), Lahey (Gavins & Lahey, 2016), Tincheva (Tincheva, 2013), Trimarco (Trimarco, 2015). *Discourse world* is the basic world that includes participants, objects and entities surrounding them

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together with background knowledge they bring to the language situation (Gavins, 2007: 9). Discourse-world participants then construct text-worlds, relying in part on their immediate discourse situation and on what they know or can infer from their own knowledge frames (Werth, 1999: 83). Generally following these ideas, we modify the notion of discourse world for the purposes of the paper. We focus on the notion of *discourse* as explained by Cook. He defines it as text and context together, “interacting in a way which is perceived as meaningful and unified by the participants” (Cook, 2001: 4). The definition specifies our understanding of discourse world. Under *discourse world of a political event* we mean a representational structure of discourse, created with the totality of texts in American, British and Australian media communication in the context of the 2017 summit.

The typology of mental representations, textualized in discourse, is not limited to discourse world and text world. Discourse world is a *conceptually-complex* representational structure of discourse. It functions along with *concepts* that are *conceptually-simple* representational structures of a minor type. In Russian cognitive linguistics *concept* is defined as mental construct that represents knowledge about objects of reality, accumulated by the community and kept in the minds of its members. They are epistemological units that present the results of understanding phenomena of the world. Concepts, functionally connected with representation of the world and collective knowledge about the world, are called representational. Russian scholar N. N. Boldyrev distinguishes between three types of representational concepts: *basic* concepts are gestalt mental structures (HOUSE, TABLE, BOOK, DOG, CAT), *superordinate* concepts are abstract (ARTEFACT, ANIMAL, PLANT), *subordinate* concepts are concrete (DESK, MONOGRAPH, FOX-TERRIER) (World Interpretation in Language, 2017: 37–38). We assume that the relations between discourse world and concepts as mental structures are those of inclusion. Discourse world of a political event can be regarded as conceptual background for minor mental representations – concepts. They are intentionally foregrounded in discourse for the sake of communication. We term this *intentional* world-modelling.

We stipulate that discourse world of the political event serves as background, against which representational concept LEADER is foregrounded. We further analyze world-modelling potential of the summit in terms of relationship between leaders-participants, and draw on relevant fragments of the context that specify frames, organized around the named concept in the American, British and Australian media communication.

## **6. Findings**

### **6.1. Systemic and discourse-acquired characteristics of concept LEADER**

Concepts as mental structures are represented in discourse by language units. Concept has got both static and dynamic characteristics that are, in fact, *systemic* and *discourse-acquired*. On the one hand, language is a static organized system of interrelated elements that fix knowledge about mental structures. On the other, language is dynamic and changeable as it serves purposes of communication. Systemic characteristics constitute the core of the concept, and reveal its integral static features, fixed by the language in lexicography. These features are well systematized in contemporary English dictionaries. Cf.:  
1. The *leader* of a group of people or an organization is the person who is in control of it or in charge of

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it. 2. The *leader* at a particular point in a race or competition is the person who is winning at that point. 3. The *leader* among a range of products or companies is the one that is most successful (Collins Cobuild Dictionary, 2008); 1. the person who leads or commands a group, organization, or country. 2. the principal player in a music group. 3. *Brit.* a leading article in a newspaper (Oxford Dictionary, 2005). Thus, the systemic features of concept LEADER include: *someone who takes control over something, governs a country, influences and regulates actions.*

Conceptual content of mental structures is subject to alterations in discourse. Since concept LEADER functions in the discourse world of a political event, it conceptually develops, modifies, and acquires dynamic features. We call these characteristics *discourse-acquired*. They specify, how concept is modified under the influence of the ideological context of summit. We have established discourse-acquired features of concept LEADER through textual realizations, as found in the media. We further make use of the following abbreviations: (A) for American, (B) for British, and (Au) for Australian, to indicate the source media and analyze the context.

The key nominations, characterizing the ‘semiotic embodiment’ of concept LEADER, is lexeme *leader*: 214 contexts (A), 150 contexts (B), 145 contexts (Au). In three media discourses concept LEADER is similarly realized with emphasis on the general character of the political event. Its participants are called *G20 leaders, the leaders of the world’s biggest economies, leaders of the world’s major economies, leaders of the world’s top economic powers, the global leaders, the world’s most powerful leaders, delegations of leaders, fellow leaders, the two leaders, leaders of nations*. Within the discourse world of the forum on international economic cooperation, they are represented as leaders of the largest economies of the world, leading economic powers, leaders of the global level, the most influential leaders who arrived as part of delegations from different countries.

Combinability of lexeme *leader* enables us to further reveal discourse-acquired features of concept LEADER and point out relevant frames within its structure. Under framing we generally understand structuring information about certain aspects of the event. Framing provides standards of communication and contribute to social world order. In the present study we argue that frames are organized around concepts. They present interpretational schemes that form the perspective of perception, and set formal borders of concepts.

## **6.2. Basic frames of concept LEADER in the discourse world of the summit**

We’ve singled out three basic frames that constitute the structure of concept LEADER in American, British and Australian media. We argue that within conceptual space of the discourse world of the summit, frames have *selective focuses*, i.e. they concentrate the readers’ attention on aspects, determined by contextual factors of geopolitical, economic, and ideological character. The world-modelling potential of a political event is realized through the creation of a *unique focus of frame*, which is consistent with the ideological vision of the political event by the authors of publications and is able to produce desirable attitudes on the part of the public.

**Frame LEADER – POLITICIAN** can be decomposed into smaller elements, or slots, reflecting the following focuses: “Subjects of political activity”, “Political relationship between leaders”, “Leader’s

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actions". For the purposes of the paper we concentrate on the slot "Political relationship between leaders". It is represented by the following lexical means: *alliances between powers, alliances among world leaders*. The unique focus of the frame is on political alliances of the leaders, that are presented as threat. Cf.: *Pope Francis said Saturday that the G20 summit in Germany "worries" him because of the potential for "very dangerous alliances" among world leaders, with particularly dire consequences for migrants. "I worry about very dangerous alliances between powers which have a distorted vision of the world: America and Russia, China and North Korea, (Russian President Vladimir) Putin and (Syria's Bashar al-) Assad over the war in Syria," the pope said in an interview with Italy's La Repubblica newspaper (Au, Yahoo 7 News).*

From the point of view of exerting ideological influence, it contributes to a rather negative evaluation of the situation by Australian journalists. The effect is enhanced through the reference to Pope's words about the danger of alliances between powers with "distorted worldview", such as America and Russia, China and North Korea, as well as by some leaders – Putin and Assad. The relationship of leaders is presented to readers as a serious reason for concern.

The unique focus of the frame is established in the following context of a metaphorical representation of Russian and American leaders in the Australian news. Cf.: *Trump vs. Putin. Within the summit walls, world leaders were dancing a delicate diplomatic waltz, with discord not only dogging the main G20 conferences, but also adding tension to bilateral asides <...> it was Trump's first head-to-head with Russia's leader President Vladimir Putin that stole the show. A day after Trump slammed Moscow's actions in Ukraine and Syria, the two men had a "robust and lengthy exchange" about allegations of Russian meddling in the 2016 US election, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said. But Tillerson, who was present at the meeting that ran for two hours and 15 minutes, also said the two alpha-male leaders "connected very quickly" with "very clear positive chemistry". (Au, SBS).*

In the foreground, there are two leaders, designated by proper names (*Trump, Putin*), who are opposed to each other (*vs* – abbr. from lat. *versus* – against). Their relationship is represented by several metaphors, the emotive components of which reinforce the manipulative effect, aimed at forming a disapproving perception of two leaders. This is facilitated by integration of typologically different metaphors. A sociomorphic metaphor describes the interaction of presidents as the relationship of a pair, dancing waltz (*dancing a delicate diplomatic waltz*). With the help of another metaphor (*stole the show*), the analogy is drawn between a one-on-one conversation of two leaders and a performance that attracted much attention. A zoomorphic metaphor (*two alpha-male leaders*) characterizes leaders as alpha-males who easily found contact on the basis of mutual sympathy (*very clear positive chemistry*). The metaphorical parallel between presidents and alpha males enriches the content of concept LEADER by adding several discourse-acquired characteristics, resulting from the association with social animals: *high status, aggressiveness, authoritativeness, attractiveness*.

In the structure of concept LEADER we have revealed one more important discourse-acquired feature – *confrontation*, implying dispute, fight, or battle between people. This characteristic is illustrated

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by the following oppositions observable in the media: *one – other world leaders, one – nineteen (the G19 + 1, G19 plus one, nineteen out of twenty (19 of the G20 countries, 19 of the 20 leaders).*

Neutral representation of the American leader, who is in opposition to a group of 19 leaders of other world powers, dominates in the US media. Cf.: *“On the overall outcome, the most important thing is that all other 19 leaders signed onto the G20 Climate and Energy Action Plan for Growth,” former State Department official Andrew Light wrote in an email to BuzzFeed News (A, BuzzFeed News).* British journalists are more focused on the tension between Trump and other leaders, and the clash of the US President with the French delegation on climate issues. Cf.: *The G20 meeting saw a number of tense encounters between Trump and other world leaders, with a particular clash between him and the French delegation over climate change (B, The Guardian).*

The division of the leaders on a number of key issues of the summit is described similarly in the media of three countries by the symbolic formula  $G20 = G19 + 1$ . Most of the contexts are found in British media communication. Cf.: *Mr Trump cancelled his own scheduled news conference on Saturday, reinforcing the image of the G20 as the G19 + 1, reports the BBC's diplomatic correspondent James Robbins. It has been a divisive summit in which the rest of the world has been struggling to come to terms with the US president's "America first" policy, our correspondent says (B, BBC News).*

The background of the perception of the American leader in the discourse world of British press involves criticism of his pre-election agenda. A string of epithets with negative connotation is employed to describe it. Cf.: *Trump's election victory, based on a nationalist, isolationist, protectionist and xenophobic agenda, marked the next stage in this process of distancing America from the world (B, The Observer).* Disapproval of the leader is reinforced by criticism of his program, based on nationalist, isolationist, protectionist, and xenophobic policies, leading America to distance from the rest of the world.

Actualization of concept LEADER in the American media features *crisis* as a characteristic that is discourse-acquired. It is associated with the American President, and the United States, “retreating” from global leadership and experiencing “erosion” of their position in the world. Cf.: *And finally, there are the Trump-created crises of the United States retreat from global leadership and the fast erosion of America's standing in the world (CIIIA, Houston Chronicle).*

**Frame LEADER – PARENT.** The characteristic of a leader as parent belongs to the President of the United States. The topic of participation of Trump's daughter in the G20 summit had the greatest dissemination in the media. In the US media dominated neutral representation of the status-role and personal interaction of the American leader and his daughter, who sat in for the President at the summit. Cf.: *The president's daughter was spotted seated with top world leaders during a discussion led by the World Bank. (A, CNBC). However, some contexts contain a rather ambiguous assessment of the first daughter's actions, who caused bustle. Cf.: *Ivanka Trump, President Donald Trump's eldest daughter, caused a stir on Saturday after she was photographed alongside world leaders during a discussion at the Group of 20 summit. (A, CNBC). Ivanka Trump, President Donald Trump's daughter and one of his top**

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*White House aides, briefly took her father's place at a meeting with other world leaders at the G20 summit here in Hamburg on Saturday, causing a stir among Trump critics on social media (A, KTLA).*

Much more negative representation of this fragment of the summit is typical of Australian media. Cf.: *Her presence at the top G20 table is the sort of blurring of lines between family and official business that Donald Trump is often criticized for. It would be highly unusual for other world leaders to have family members take their place at the tables of such a high-profile international event.* (Au, The Sydney Morning Herald). In fact, Ivanka broke with protocol when she took her father's seat at the summit. A leader, who made no distinction between official and personal, was openly criticized. Similar behavior on the part of other world leaders would be considered inappropriate.

**Frame LEADER – SPOUSE** constitutes another element of concept LEADER. Much attention in the Australian media is paid to the role of the wife of the American President in relations with the leaders of the world powers. Increased attention to the “first lady” implies indirect critical evaluation of the American leader. His image is construed against the background of the slightest details about his wife. They, in fact, have very little relevance in the context of the main objectives of the summit. Cf.: *MELANIA IS A SECRET DIPLOMATIC WEAPON. The First Lady has emerged as a surprisingly strong part of the US diplomatic team, having been deployed on a charm offensive against President Putin* (A, News.com.au). Melania is metaphorically described as a secret weapon. Not only does her representation as a strong part in the diplomatic team characterizes the American president, but also points out the balance of power in the world, with the main intrigue being the relationship between Trump and Putin.

Details about the leisure of the leaders, that are not directly related to the goals of the summit, are intended to contribute to the overall ambiguous evaluation of interaction between the United States and Russia. Cf.: *The leaders enjoyed a performance of Beethoven's ninth symphony at Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie concert hall on Friday night and a dinner at which Melania Trump sat next to Russian leader Vladimir Putin, who had a much-watched first meeting with Mr Trump on Friday* (Au, SBS). The negative modeling of the American leader in the Australian press is indirectly created through the juxtaposition of the objectives of the summit in the face of global challenges and details of the first lady's life. With regard to this, the focus on her Slavonic origin and a place near Putin during dinner seems no coincidence.

## **7. Conclusion**

The discourse world of the political event is a mental and linguistic representational structure that is objectified in media discourse. It is a context-dependent informational model of a politically and economically significant event, embodied by semiotic resources of the English language in the totality of media texts, united by the theme of G20 summit. Within the conceptual space of the discourse world, concept LEADER is foregrounded. Three frames are organized around the concept in American, British, and Australian media. They are LEADER – POLITICIAN, LEADER – PARENT, and LEADER – SPOUSE. The world-modeling potential of the political event is realized as representation of relationship between the leaders of the summit, with unique focus on those details of reality that are predetermined by



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the most ambiguous political factors, and best serve the purpose of ideological influence. As a result of functioning in discourse, concept LEADER enriches with discourse-acquired characteristics.

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