

Concept MERITOCRAT Verbalization in Present-day American Printed Media

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Abstract: This paper aims to examine the concept MERITOCRAT verbalization peculiarities in present-day American printed media. In this vein, it is necessary to accomplish the following: to introduce lexical means of the concept representation in communicative situations "Meritocrat – Average Citizen" and "Meritocrat – Politician"; to determine the concept MERITOCRAT content on the basis of selected lexical units which represent facts and events connected with the personality of a meritocrat and indicate their semantic features. Concept MERITOCRAT verbalization has been examined through the prism of the conceptual analysis based on frames modeling techniques. Relations between the concept components are modeled by the *Subject-Centered Frame: I'd say today's [HERE-NOW] ambitious [SUCH] meritocratic elites [SOMEONE] achieve and preserve their status [DOING SOMETHING] mainly by being disciplined*. Slot SUCH reveals the physical and internal characteristics of the meritocrat. Slot SOMEONE specifies the perpetrator of a political act. Slot DOING SOMETHING describes the meritocratic actions which are a part of the context. Slot HERE-NOW indicates the existence of a character in a certain temporal framework. The paper analyzes concept verbalization peculiarities on the basis of communicative situations, which reflect the journalist's imaginary world correlating with the real world. Research scientific novelty is determined by pioneering nominative units usage for the concept MERITOCRAT verbalization in present-day American printed media.

Keywords: *Concept MERITOCRAT, Present-day American Printed Media, Conceptual Analysis*

1. Introduction

The current stage of linguistic studies is marked by the increasing interest in the investigation of cognition as the reflection of objective reality in human activity, which, being determined by the person's subjective intentions, goals, interests, cultural and educational levels, social status etc., is carried out in particular sociocultural settings. That is why political discourse perceived by an average citizen, a journalist or a writer, as people with different professional challenges, is distinguished according to the level of subjective information represented about the meritocrat. The cognitive and lingual nature of the concept determines its significant role in establishing a correlation between objective reality represented in individual consciousness and lingual means of its manifestation.

Investigation of concepts verbalization and specifically of the concept MERITOCRAT presents

different approaches, viz. anthropocentrism (Karasik, 2002; Kubryakova, 1997), possible worlds theory (Popper, 2005), communicative linguistics (Ballmer, 1981; Grice, 1975; Van Dijk&Kintsh, 1983; Leech, 1983; Sadock, 1974) and cognitive linguistics (Barsalou, 1989; Lakoff, 1990; Nuyts, 1993; Fillmore, 1982).

At the turn of the 20th century investigations display a growing tendency to treat the concept as a structurally complex phenomenon with discrete interrelated and interdependent parts. Each concept model has a definite but not rigid conventional structure (Jackendoff, 1993). The number of concept individual representation units is so numerous that it is practically impossible to capture and analyze all of them. Hence, it is necessary to conduct a complex investigation of knowledge representation structures (propositions, frames, networks, scenarios, scripts), the leading role among which is given to the frame (Fillmore, 1982; Zhabotinska, 2008). An important point lies in a true understanding of the frame through more extensive knowledge about the world, which causes the necessity to create and investigate the communicative frame (Romanov, 1988; Morozova, 2005). Thus, we determine where and how components of communicative activities can reveal their properties in order to find out possibilities of a situational model's elements, to reflect the communication act's meaningful characteristics.

The topicality of the research is determined by cognitive and communicative linguistic paradigms which investigate verbalization of extra-linguistic entities by multilevel language units, help to discover the concept MERITOCRAT representation peculiarities in present-day American printed media. The paper is aimed at discovering the concept MERITOCRAT verbalization peculiarities in present-day American printed media. The achievement of this aim requires the accomplishment of the following tasks: to introduce lexical means of the concept MERITOCRAT representation in American printed media; to identify lexico-semantic peculiarities of communicative situations "Meritocrat – Average Citizen" and "Meritocrat – Politician".

2. Lingo-cognitive principles of the concept MERITOCRAT analysis

In the past decades the structural approach, which investigates linguistic phenomena focusing on the internal organization of different language levels and language in general, has been replaced by the cognitive and communicative linguistic approach (Ballmer, 1981; Grice, 1975; Langacker, 1987). The latter requires the examination of the language system in action and the process of communication by itself. According to this approach each language system element is seen as a unity of functional features used in speech for maximum adequacy of the communication process (Leech, 1983; Sadock, 1974; Searle, 1976; Langacker, 2008). Each linguistic unit serves both cognition and communication (Kubryakova, 1997, p.5).

Cognitive and communicative linguistic paradigm studies language and speech units and is based on the analysis of the information transmission and the effectiveness of reception in the communication process. It describes current language nominative units systematically, defines language trends in their development, and shows how one or another nominative unit is subjected to the fulfillment of its goals in communication (Levytskiy, 2006: 137-138). Such linguistic research reorientation of the language functional aspects has led to the

development of various branches in Linguistics, expanding its research subject. It has also stimulated the development of the following internal linguistic interaction problems: *cognitive science* (Nuyts, 1993; Fillmore, 1982), *nomination theory* (Levytskyi, 2006; Clark, 2006; Kubryakova, 1997), *onomasiology* (Oakley, 1998; Jackendoff, 1993), *semasiology* (Barsalou, 1989; Lakoff, 1990; Nuyts, 1993; Fillmore, 1982) etc.

3. Linguistic and cognitive aspects of reality modeling in present-day American printed media

The world is not given to a man directly but it is created and interpreted by his mind and consciousness (Laszlo, 1996). Impression and reception of objective reality, things, objects, and actions are represented in our consciousness in the form of mental representations. Things and objects around us are not marked in language directly, they are indicated through the world designed and imprinted in our minds. The formation process of the reality image in the human consciousness is subjective because the world is reflected by man according to specific features of his lifestyle and status in the society, etc. (Taylor, 1999:101).

The problem of the reality representation, in fact *the problem of reference*, is considered to be one of the central tasks of text linguistics. While analyzing the text it is important for researchers to reconstruct explicitly and precisely the way an interpreter makes the text correlate with the world. Reference is not a quality represented by the language expression or text itself. A person uses the expression or text, correlating it with the reference situation, *real* or *possible world* according to his intention. It defines the so-called reference modality of the expression or text. The latter is determined by the correlation between the text cognitive component, its subject aspect and the real world (Popper, 2005).

The scientific knowledge we gained while studying present-day American prose and printed media texts as products of organized writing, demands to distinguish such notions as “prose” and “printed media” texts.

Prose text is an imprint of the human activity information, namely its author. Expanding the artist’s vision, realizing the true meaning of the work content, following the writer’s ideas, we do not only take part in the process of learning, but also get access to the artist’s creative lab. As a result we transform the reality reflected by the writer’s creative individuality. Prose text division reveals implicitly the author's settings for the reader’s perception of the text and shows how the writer perceives certain facts and events on his own. On the one hand, an expression by itself reveals subjective formal psychological features owned by the author. On the other, it leads to the creation of certain text design systems which are favorable for its reproduction.

Study of a prose text as a communication unit involves not only its internal structure analysis but also factors determining the text as a part of a real or depicted situation. It reveals the simultaneous detection of semantics and a prose text structure, which causes not only the formation of meaning but achievement of the communication aim. Under the latter we understand spiritual or physical influence imposed on the reader or communicators

during their communication (e.g. opinion or information exchange). Prose text anthropocentrism is determined by the interaction of the sender and writer through the addressee-reader's system created by the author. Theoretically the addressee-reader's system in the structure of a prose text and manifestation forms of the sender and writer can be displayed both explicitly and implicitly. The writer recreates characters' actions, portrays and interprets their personal features according to their personal and creative orientations.

In terms of communication printed media texts belong to the type of indirect communication like all other media texts. Investigated genres of printed media texts - analytical articles, reports and interviews - are the main types of secondary communication texts where the reference space is treated as a verbal message which preceded the communication. The aim of this text type is to display the message which exists independently outside of secondary communication texts (Kolegaeva, 1991: 76). The initial message is treated as the "original text". In our study the meritocrat's social and political life is considered to be the "original text". Printed media text reference is displayed by a piece of the objective reality (reference space), namely the life of a meritocrat.

Thus, due to the subjective and communicative duality in structure of prose and printed media texts, we distinguish two types of communication: *real* and *fictional* (intertextual). Real communication occurs according to the author-text-reader system, fictional communication reveals characters' communication in the text. Firstly, as a part of fictional communication the author intends to depict the microcosm image created by his imagination. Secondly, he wants the addressee to be a part of this microcosm. In printed media texts the author uses techniques designed to ensure the communicants' adequate transmission and perception of the content and meaning of the text, as well as the predicted impact factor as an integral part of communication.

4. Methodology of lexico-semantic structure analysis of the concept MERITOCRAT

Concept MERITOCRAT verbalization in communicative situations in present-day American printed media has been examined through the prism of the *conceptual analysis* (Langacker, 1987; Nuyts, 1993) based on *frames modeling techniques* (Zhabotynska, 2010). The concept MERITOCRAT content is constituted by a range of lexical means, which nominate facts and events related to the political life. Zhabotynska (2010) argues that building the networks at any conceptual level employs a universal tool – the limited set of propositions that belong to the five basic frames. Frame semantics defines a *frame* as "a system of categories structured in accordance with some motivating context" (Fillmore, 1982). To extend this idea, Zhabotynska (2010) suggests that the very foundation of our information system is structured by several highly abstract basic frames, where the most fundamental categories of thought are arranged in accordance with the way we perceive things of the experiential world. Analysis of multiple lexical, derivational, and syntactic data (Zhabotynska 2004) makes it possible to presume that the basic frames are five in number. These frames – *the Subject-Centered Frame, the Taxonomic Frame, the Possession Frame, the Action Frame, and the Comparison Frame* – include a limited number of most abstract propositional schemas whose type is defined by

the frame they belong to. (Cf. a somewhat different typology of schemas in (Dirven&Verspoor, 1997, p. 77-90).

Relations between the concept MERITOCRAT components and nominative units, that ensure its implementation in present-day American printed media, are modeled by the *Subject-Centered Frame*(Jabotynska, 2004). The Subject-Centered Frame includes the following active slots: SUCH, SOMEONE, DOING SOMETHING, HERE-NOW. In the center of each printed media text the meritocrat is treated as a person who has certain physical and spiritual characteristics of a human being: feelings, thoughts, words, certain manners of behavior in the surrounding world. Hence, semantic structure, which reveals the concept MERITOCRAT verbalization process, can be displayed by the following figure (Figure 1): *I'd say today's [HERE-NOW] ambitious [SUCH] meritocratic elites [SOMEONE] achieve and preserve their status [DOING SOMETHING] not mainly by being corrupt but mainly by being disciplined.*

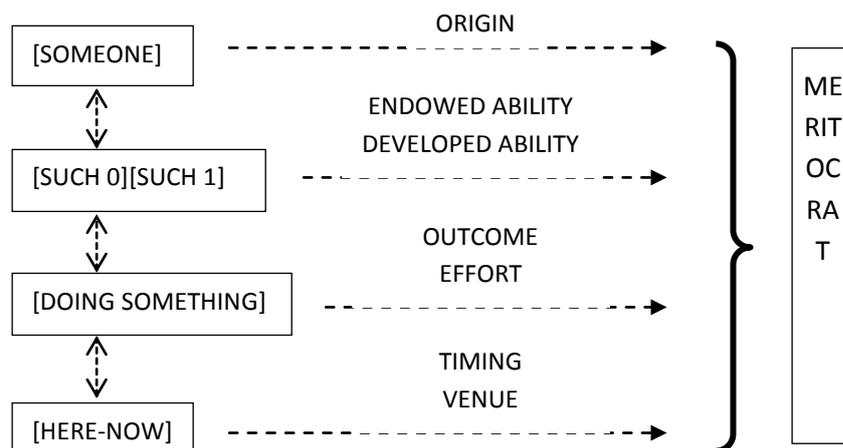


Figure 1. Semantic structure of the concept MERITOCRAT

Slots SUCH0 and SUCH1 reveal the physical and internal characteristics of the meritocrat. Slot SOMEONE specifies the perpetrator of a political act. Slot DOING SOMETHING describes the meritocratic actions which are a part of the context. Slot HERE-NOW indicates the existence of a character in certain events as regards spatial and temporal frameworks.

Analysis of the actual illustrative material allowed us to deduce the following options for slots verbalization of the concept MERITOCRAT. Slot SOMEONE:a). common names:

By elevating the children of farmers and janitors as well as lawyers and stockbrokers, we've created what seems like the most capable, hardworking, high-I.Q. elite in all of human history. And for the last 10 years, we've watched this same elite lead us off a cliff — mostly by being too smart for its own good(New York Times, November 5, 2011);Specifically, Mr. Klein is the chancellor of New York's public school system, which

might make his recurring dream an act of empathy with the millions of pupils who return to school next week. More generally, and more relevantly to his nocturnal imaginings, he embodies the postwar meritocracy. His own trajectory -- from boyhood in a Queens housing project as the son of a postal worker with a 10th-grade education to degrees from Columbia University and Harvard Law School -- relied not on inherited wealth, not on family connections, not on a WASP pedigree, but on academic prowess (New York Times, September 8, 2004);

b) nominative units representing features of character/gender/social status:

The creation of an aptitude-based elite, he argues, has inevitably segregated America by talent: More than at any point in our history, the smartest people generally go to high school and certainly to college with one another, move en masse to "creative cities" after college, marry their fellow high achievers and then raise their kids in the cocoons of what Murray calls the SuperZips. In this sense, Murray's analysis follows the late, great Christopher Lasch in arguing that meritocracy works almost too well: Plucking the best and brightest from every walk of life and then encouraging them to live in community almost exclusively with one another means that the rest of the country is deprived of people who otherwise would have been local leaders, local entrepreneurs, the hubs of local social networks, etc; Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., said voters and high-tech companies in his district have been most concerned with more jobs, not more immigration. "We want to put to the head of the line the people ... that create net jobs. They'll create jobs for people of all colors, of all races," Issa said. "I'm voting for (this bill) because I know as a former businessman ... that jobs and the economy are what people want us to work on. This is a good down payment" (USA Today, November 30, 2012).

While analyzing the meritocrat's holistic identity we found out key nominative units describing the meritocrat's appearance and manner of behavior as the most fundamental sources of information. Appearance and behavior perception in communicative situations is the starting point of mutual opinion formation, which determines the general sympathy or antipathy line between communicators:

If I understand correctly, the argument Murray makes is that the negative impact is cultural. The "cultural elite" looks down on working-class culture, and at the same time the cultural elite declines to promulgate their own, more stable lifestyles as an aspirational goal for working-class families. To caricature the argument, if wealthy people drank more Bud and went hunting more often, working-class men would work harder to emulate the wealthy by staying employed and marrying their girlfriends (New York Times, February 28, 2012);

Like many memoirs, "Lost in the Meritocracy" combines penetrating shrewdness with remarkable blind spots. Take the book's central question: How did anyone as smart as Kirn get into such a fix? The implication of the title is that "meritocracy" itself was to blame... So there you have it: a slightly built, young Walter Kirn quickly learned that achievement could be precisely quantified, but also that the system for arriving at that quantification could be gamed. "I was the system's pure product," he writes, "sly and flexible, not so much educated as wised up" (New York Times, May 24, 2009).

Slot DOING SOMETHING verbal information shows that meritocrats put all of their energy into working hard and getting the right answers to the questions at hand – and no energy into acquiring the power to implement those answers:

Most of all, how would this man[Obama], who had never run anything but a law review, a Senate office and his campaign staff, fare as national leader in a time of ultimate stress? From early in the campaign, he had opened his stump speeches by declaring he was running now because “we are at a defining moment in our history” and “cannot afford to wait”. To some ears, it sounded grandiose. Now, it was all too true. Was this more than he had bargained for – or was this just the sort of moment for which the natural aristocrat was made?(New Statesman, October 20, 2008: 22);

“It’s a miracle that [Obama’s] come aboard. I don’t know where he’s come from, but it’s communication on a whole other level, and it transcends the politics of today,” Doug Summers, a screenwriter in Santa Fe, said to me. “It’s old versus new. We’ve been waiting for a guy like this. Like I told my kids: this guy’s going to change your lives” (New Statesman, October 20, 2008: 25).

Meritocrats are good corporate citizens but might often end up being "eaten" by co-workers who are more politically savvy and power-oriented (Husen, 1974; LaVaque-Manty 2009):

...Palin’s stunning burst into the Outside, as Alaskans call the Lower 48, was soon enough trumped by cataclysm, the Wall Street meltdown. And within two weeks, the financial crisis had, among other things, utterly reshaped the presidential race, throwing a bevy of key swing states into clear leads for Obama. This was received as predictable – any evidence of economic plight worked to Obama’s benefit, right? (New Statesman, October 16, 2008).

Sometimes meritocrats haven't made the shift from the educational setting (where simply getting the right answer gets you the highest grade) to a world in which that right answer has to be "sold." These people aren't necessarily new to the business world – they may be in their 40s or 50s – but they're still operating under the assumptions that they haven't worked since they left school (Husen, 1974; LaVaque-Manty 2009):

“There’s 100 percent no question that most people on Wall Street, even if they have nice credentials, are generally developmentally disabled,” a hedge-fund analyst I’ll call Eli told me, only somewhat jokingly, one night over dinner. Hedge funds, according to Eli and his colleagues, are the real deal; the innermost of inner rings. “I was surrounded my whole life by people who took intelligence very seriously,” Eli told me. “I went to good schools, I worked at places surrounded by smart people. And until now I’ve never been at a place that prides itself on having the smartest people and where it’s actually true.” That confidence, of course, projects outward, and from it emanates the authority that the financial sector as a whole enjoyed (and in certain circles still enjoys). “At the end of the day,” Eli says with a laugh, “America does what Wall Street tells it to do. And whether that’s because Wall Street knows best, whether Wall Street is intelligently self-dealing, or whether it has no idea and talks out of its ass, that is the culture in America”(The Nation, June 25, 2012).

Meritocrats are usually less effective than they might be because they fail to persuade people of the value of their ideas. They may even pride themselves on their refusal

to sully themselves by "playing politics." In the worst-case scenario, they're the people who are let go in a downsizing because they haven't developed and maintained a contact network that would help upper management see their value. They also have a more difficult time finding new work for the same reason. This is a very common and very dangerous problem(Kingston, 2006):

In opposition, Tony Blair feared that the meritocratic utopia might never be reached. "We are light years from being a true meritocracy," he sighed in 1995. By 1997, he had perked up. "I want a society based on meritocracy," he proclaimed just before his election victory. After winning power, he made his intentions clear. "The Britain of the elite is over. The new Britain is a meritocracy." The new Britain was coming and nothing could stop it because "the old establishment is being replaced by a new, larger, more meritocratic middle class". The future would be democratic because "the meritocracy is built on the potential of the many, not the few". It would be profitable because "the meritocratic society is the only one that can exploit its economic potential to the full for all its people". For all Blair's enthusiasm, the question raised by Young's rebels remained as valid as ever: how do you evaluate? (New Statesman, 8 September, 2003)

Any meritocrat's political or social activity is connected to certain spatial and temporal characteristics - the time and venue of the event. Thus, the illustrative material of the slot HERE-NOW shows as a rule some "elite" places which are known as brand names in the world:

But this sudden fall from grace doesn't make Corzine's life story any less emblematic of our meritocratic era. Indeed, his rise, recklessness and ruin are all of a piece. For decades, the United States has been opening paths to privilege for its brightest and most determined young people, culling the best and the brightest from Illinois and Mississippi and Montana and placing them in positions of power in Manhattan and Washington(New York Times, September 8, 2004);

...I was hoping to gain entrance to HunterCollege High School[Manhattan]...Each year, between 3,000 and 4,000 studentscitywide score high enough on their fifth-grade standardizedtests to qualify to take Hunter's entrance exam in the sixthgrade; ultimately, only 185 will be offered admission...I was one of the lucky ones who made it through, andmy experience there transformed me. It was at Hunter thatI absorbed the open-minded, self-assured cosmopolitanismthat is the guiding ethos of the current American ruling class (The Nation, June 6, 2012).

The information verbalized in the Subject-Centered Frame proves the assertion that social identities are constructed and implies that the meanings of 'meritocrat' identities are not a given but are contingent on history and context. Ameritocratcan be defined as "the very bright hardworking executive who alienates co-workers because of repeated failure to acknowledge others' contributions of the twentieth century, who would today be constructed as "meritocrats" (Kingston, 2006: 118). Trends such as meritocrats' social roles in the modern society have heightened concerns about whether societies need them. The meritocrats are also recognized as increasingly heterogeneous with substantial differences in socio-economic status, employment patterns and stability, education, ethnicity and

gender (Hayes, 2012). More fundamentally, the definition of 'who' is a 'meritocrat' is ambiguous and contingent.

5. Findings and the results

In the context of this research we've analyzed concept verbalization peculiarities on the basis of communicative situations "Meritocrat – Average Citizen" and "Meritocrat – Politician", which reflect the journalist's imaginary world correlating with the real world. We understand the real world as mental space segments within which the possibility of certain actions is implemented. We highlighted the lingual and cognitive aspects of the concept MERITOCRAT and analyzed the language material and defined the concept key features based on the information verbalized in the Subject-Centered Frame. To determine the concept MERITOCRAT content we selected lexical units which represent facts and events connected with the personality of a meritocrat and indicated their semantic features.

6. Conclusions

From a multi-disciplinary review of literature (economics, labour market research, sociology and cultural studies) some specific research questions were developed to study the construction of the concept MERITOCRAT. They related to exploring the versions of 'meritocrat' identity that were being discursively constructed, identifying those who were being targeted by these constructions (du Gay, 1996), identifying the social actors involved in this discursive construction of 'meritocrat' identity and exploring the reasons for their involvement, and examining the implications of such constructions of identity. Much of the existing research on meritocracy and meritocrats has focused on the content of age-based stereotypes, their cultural meaning and the outcomes or material effects of the marginalisation of meritocrats in the labour market.

Yet no research has explicitly addressed the issue of the processes of meritocrat's identity construction based on lingo-cognitive principles of the concept MERITOCRAT analysis and this is the potential contribution to multi-disciplinary investigation approaches.

Research scientific novelty is determined by a pioneering nominative unit usage of the concept MERITOCRAT verbalization in present-day American printed media. The Project theoretical significance stipulates that the definition of the concept MERITOCRAT semantic features contribute to the development of Cognitive Semantics and Cognitive Linguistics.

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