

Key Place Names of the Russian Opposition Discourse

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Abstract

The paper focuses on discourse analysis of the modern Russian civic society. The methodological basis for complex linguistic research of civic society construction includes revealing of mass consciousness attitudes through 'key words', competition of definitions, metaphors, actual toponyms, etc. 'Key place names of current moment' – such as *Bolotnaja Square*, *Saharova Square* – are discussed. The author concludes that the choice of a place name and its derivatives is the indicator of political competition between 'interpreters', or 'the fight of discourses'. Linguistic games with toponyms in the political context are also analyzed.

The sources of the research are mass media publications and blogs related to protest rallies of the end of 2011-the first half of 2012 in Russia. Linguistic projects 'Russian word 2012' by M. Epshtein and 'Press-word 2012' are also reviewed.

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Introduction

Knowing the pragmatic meaning of place names may be important for understanding the ideological discourse (Dijk 2008, Fairclough 1989, 1992, Kitaygorodskaya and Rosanova 1996, Shmeleva 1993). A large number of proper names are associated with specific events that have place markers. Thus, during the last few years, in Russian political discourse a variety of toponyms have obtained a symbolic value that is relevant for the modern Russian history (half of TOP-30 most popular new words rating 2012 in Mass Media are toponyms and anthroponyms – Table 1). *Bolotnaya Square*, *Sakharov Avenue* and others have become the signs of the protest movement of 2011-2012 (Arkhangelsky 2012, Oreshkin 2012). Due to their relevance for public life in Russia these place names were included in the list of the key words in 2012. They also have become the basis for the formation of new words (Press-word 2012, Word of the year 2012).

Rating	Word	References in Russian Internet
1	Пусси Райот PussyRiot	58 144
3	Болотное дело Bolotnoje Case	3674
4	ОккупайАбай OccupyAbai	3332
5	Света-из-Иваново Sveta from Ivanovo	1255
8	Сердюковский Serdukov's, сердюковщина Serdjukov-style action, сердюковские реформы Serdukov's reforms	563
9	Путинизм Pitinism, путинизация Putinisation	545
10	«чуровщина» Churov-style action, чуровский Churov's	508
11	Путинг Putting	463
13	Пуськи Pussies	350
18	'дамы сердюкова' Serdukov's Ladies	125
19	миллионы Собчак Sobchak's millions	86
24	Пуссинист Pussynist	54
27	«пуськина мать» Pussy Mother	35
32	Движение Про-Пусси Pro-Pussy Movement	20
33	Демедведизация Demedvedevisation	16

Table 1. New words and phrases rating of Mass Media references in 2012 (only ranking of proper names presented)

In 2012 oppositionists gathered on *Bolotnaya Square* for the first authorized rally; *Sakharov Avenue* hosted the biggest protest rally; oppositionists regularly gathered near the monument to *Abai Kunanbaev* in May 2012. Russia had not seen protest actions at this scale in the past 10-15 years. The protesters mentioned the awakened 'civil society' and social changes that had taken place in the country. The meaning of several place names, which they obtained in the political context, could be considered as a linguistic marker of the authority-opposition confrontation.

The present research is aimed at studying 'the competition for meaning' and formation of connotations of the above mentioned place names under conditions of ideological competition.

Materials and Methods

The sources of the research are mass media publications and blog materials on protest activities in the period between the end of 2011 and the first half of 2012. Linguistic projects 'Russian word 2012' by M. Epshtein and 'Press-word 2012' are also reviewed. Based on this corpus, we study the most popular place names ('key toponyms of current moment') in different ideological contexts.

Results

According to the poll ‘Press-word 2012’, several toponyms essential for understanding the relationship between authorities and opposition have become highly topical in the media and blogosphere. With regard to derivation and metaphor creation, the most frequent and productive ones are ***Bolotnaya Square and Sakharov Avenue***. *Bolotnoe Case* had 3674 references in the Russian Internet in 2012. Press and blogs of opposition accentuated the meaning of place names *Bolotnaya* and *Sakharov (Sakharova)* as signs of protest movement.

Whatever happens today, and no matter what will happen in the future, **Bolotnaya and Sakharova have already taken their place in history and historical books** as the moment of public spirit rise, aroused patriotism and belief in democracy (Vladimir Ryzhkov, Russian politician).

Bolotnaya and all that goes with it, is not a single phenomenon, but a **demonstration of deep social changes** that have occurred in the country (Anatoly Chubais, the head of the state corporation).

Speakers of the party of power actively used the semantic potential of the place name *Bolotnaya Square* to discredit the opponent using linguistic means. The etymology of the place name *Bolotnaya Square* is obvious to Russian native speakers (the adjective *bolotny* ‘boggy’ means ‘pertaining to a bog, march, swamp’) and it unequivocally emphasizes the negative evaluation of the proper name:

The freedom that you and your **boggy liberal supporters** suggest, people just do not need ... <...> From **‘boggy leaders’** one could only hear something like: ‘Here soon a million protesters will come! And then ...’ (A. Byuro, politician).

‘Boggy liberals’ are the most fussy, naive, and obviously evil individuals, in terms of traditional Russian culture; they failed to rouse the masses to revolt due to misidentification of the expectations of the modern Russian society (‘Zhivoy Zhyurnal’ (LiveJournal))

The attributive feature easily develops into a discrediting metaphor:

...all our **‘boggy fauna’** unanimously got involved in the persecution of the Church and the Patriarch (Mikhail Leontjev, journalist)

The rallies and meetings of opposition, which took place on *Sakharov Avenue*, were called *‘Sakhar-show’* (‘Sugar-show’) (an analytical model with a clipped toponym) in discourses of the opponents. The derogative connotation is formed both through lexical means and a specific derivational model. *Sakharov Avenue* takes its name after the human rights and freedom activist Andrey Sakharov. It is symbolic that oppositionists gathered just at that place. The clipped model actualizes the root meaning *sakhar-* (‘sugar-’) (‘sweet show’),

breaking positive associations between meetings of opposition and the anthroponym (the personal name of the popular public figure.)

As follows from the analysis, abusive and pejorative connotations of place names *Bolotnaya Square* and *Sakharov Avenue* are frequently used in the pro-government discourse. This strategy is supported by discrediting derivational models and combinability.

Bolotno-sakharny (boggy-sugar) protest by no means represents the whole Russia, whether you like it or not (Andrew Pesotsky, politician).

Another toponym related to the political activity in 2011-2012 is the place near the monument to Abai Kunanbaev (Abai Qunanbaiuli) (Kazakh poet and educator) on the Chistoprudny Boulevard, which became popular due to the placement of the opposition camp.

For a few of days Abai Kunanbaev has been the most popular poet of the Russian capital. Since last Wednesday a modest statute to the Kazakh poet in the shadows of chestnut trees on the Chistoprudny Boulevard has been witnessing these-called 'opposition festivities'. The campaign was wittily called '**OccupyAbai**' by analogy with the American Occupy Wall Street. People speak of it either with sympathy or irritation - depending on the political affiliation (E. Shahnovsky, journalist).

According to the poll 'Press-word 2012', the word combination 'OccupyAbai' had 3332 references in mass media.

The hash-tag with the name of the protest campaign '**#OccupyAbai**' appeared on Twitter. This toponym became both the name of the place of protest meetings and the name of the movement. It also became the basis for formation of new lexical units.

The new word quickly acquired inflectional paradigm and, due to compression, it was reduced to one of two structural components.

...Why did **Occupy** become what it became (**Rus. Occupay-em**)? (LiveJournal)

According to word formation principles that characterize 'key words of the current moment', new derivatives of the new word emerged: the protest participants were called *okkupaytsy* ('occupiers') *abai-addikty* ('abai-addicts'), their community was named *Abai-commune*, and the social life of the opposition included 'Abbai readings'.

Conclusions

Public communication in Russia is characterized by 'the struggle of discourses,' which is determined by intentions of the authorities and the opposition to dominate. The discourse of political opponents is characterized by the use of key toponyms that have ideologically pragmatic meanings. This is instrumental for reconstructing basic social attitudes. Following

the results of the study of development of new pragmatic meanings of place names and formation of new toponymical units in the political vocabulary, it is possible to describe peculiarities of the current social dialogue and subjects of political life.

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