

THE NOTION OF TRUTH IN MODERN LINGUISTICS: TELEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

ПОНЯТТЯ ІСТИННОСТІ У СУЧАСНОМУ МОВОЗНАВСТВІ: ТЕЛЕОЛОГІЧНА ПЕРСПЕКТИВА

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This paper is an overview of classical and traditional approaches to the problem of truth in modern linguistics with reliance on teleological conceptual and methodological apparatus. The research is based on the material of present-day political discourse. The notion of truth is viewed as profoundly problematic in philosophy, logic, psychology and linguistics, given its conceptual fluidity. The teleological investigation of the notion of truth in discourse gets even more complicated, because, on top of it all, it involves no less ambivalent notions: 'right', 'wrong', 'good', 'the final purpose', pertaining to the ideal to strive for. Taking into account the vagaries of understanding what is true or false, good or bad, right or wrong in political discourse, an interdisciplinary methodology was suggested, which, hopefully, may encompass at least the most salient aspects of the notion of truth in modern linguistics. In the focus of this teleological account are both classical and modern linguistically relevant theories of truth. Traditional approaches, like correspondence and coherence theories of truth, are based on the monist rigid assumption that an utterance can be either true or false, excluding the third. Modern theories of truth are prone to accept many-valued, pluralistic treatment of true meaning on the principles of compositional semantics, contextualist views, pragmatic, intuitionistic and non-linguistic factors. The teleological perspective in truth-related investigations necessitates an interdisciplinary approach to the notion of truth in modern linguistics by virtue of conceptual ambiguity of the basic teleological categories. Application of teleological methods to the truth-conditional analysis of sentences with reference to the future and with a postponed truth value may be plausible in linguistic investigations. The findings of this research suggest that the truth-value analysis of sentences about purpose-related events with reference to the past, present or future will require the application of different truth theories or their combination. The results of this research show that the analysis of purposive utterances about the future with postponed manifestation of truth values may require the methodology of dynamic semantics. According to the tenets of dynamic semantics, the knowledge and information about linguistically represented events, objects, state of affairs may deepen over time, and in this way truth values of the propositional content of utterances in political discourse may be verified. The theoretical overview and the analysis of the notion of truth from the teleological perspective has shown the plausibility of an interdisciplinary approach to the problem of truth in discourse. The principles of dynamic semantics and default semantics relying on the tenets of the theory of 'deep' interpretation have also proven effective in establishing teleologically-related truth values.

Key words: moral teleology, truth values, political discourse, correspondence theory, coherence theory, many-valued truth theory, 'deep' understanding.

Стаття присвячена аналізу телеологічно релевантних критеріїв істинності висловлення у сучасному мовознавстві на матеріалі англomовного політичного дискурсу. Актуальність розвідки зумовлена потребою виявлення ціннісно-цільових закономірностей і чинників, котрі задовольняють умови істинності висловлення цілепокладального типу. Дослідження виконане на основі науково-методологічних засад моральної телеології у руслі 'кумулятивної' семантики ('dynamic' semantics) із залученням принципів 'глибокого' розуміння ('deep' understanding) висловлення. Особливу увагу приділено розгляду істиннісно-цільових чинників, котрі зумовлюють розбіжності між істиннісними характеристиками висловленого і сприйнятого смислу. Серед філософів, психологів, лінгвістів поняття істинності набуло репутацію надзвичайно складного концептуального феномену. Телеологічне дослідження поняття істинності ще більш ускладнено з огляду на те, що воно залучає не менш амбівалентні концептуальні сутності: 'благо', 'кінцева мета', 'моральна відповідність', 'моральна невідповідність'. Враховуючи змістову 'розмитість' концептуального апарату дослідження, було запропоновано міждисциплінарний підхід до розгляду телеологічно релевантних аспектів поняття істинності. Запропоноване дослідження зосереджене на аналізі класичних і новітніх теорій істинності, застосованих у царині сучасного мовознавства. Традиційні підходи, як от теорія відповідності (*correspondence theory*), теорія когерентності (*coherence theory*), ґрунтуються на Аристотелівській аксіомі вилучення третього, що припускає лише два варіанти означення висловлення: істинне або хибне. Сучасні теорії схильні до плюралістичного осмислення істинності, залучаючи міждисциплінарну методологію композиційної семантики, контекстуалізму, прагматики, інтуїтивістської і нечіткої логіки, котрі пропонують більш гнучкі підходи до цієї наукової проблеми. Результати виконаного дослідження вказують на те, що висловлення про майбутні події, явища, мету, котрі класичні теорії взагалі не розглядають як такі, що позбавлені істиннісних ознак, можуть бути об'єктом аналізу у парадигмі кумулятивної ('dynamic') семантики. Відповідно до принципів кумулятивної семантики знання і відомості про майбутні події поглиблюються і розширюються з плином часу і таким чином визначаються істиннісні характеристики висловлень про майбутнє. Запропонований огляд класичних і новітніх теорій істинності у телеологічній перспективі вказує на потенційну доцільність і ефективність міждисциплінарного підходу до аналізу поняття істинності у політичному дискурсі.

Ключові слова: моральна телеологія, прагматична теорія істинності, теорія відповідності, теорія когерентності, теорія множинної (*many-valued*) істинності.

Problem statement. Proverbial Pontius Pilate, according to the apocryphal story, demonstrated the paramount complexity of the notion of truth by falling silent and giving up the attempt to answer the question “What is truth?”. The key teleologically-related notions ‘the final goal’, ‘good,’ ‘right’, ‘wrong’, ‘truth’ are monstrously debatable and inherently vague. While writing about truth, A. Tarski tried “to avoid any ambiguity” [1, p. 375], but it inevitably crops up by virtue of the nebulous nature of truth value problems. This account is specifically focused on teleological linguistically relevant moral and ethical aspects of truth in political discourse. Truth value aspects of utterances in discourse fall into line with the conceptual apparatus and the methodology of moral teleology.

Moral teleology is about desirable virtuous purposefulness of human actions. According to the tenets of moral teleology, whatever a human being ventures to do is supposed to be for the sake of the common GOOD as the final purpose [2]. At the same time, teleology is posited as the philosophy of science aiming at the “ultimate” explanation of meaning [3; 4]. Presumably, the word “ultimate” gives us the ground to suppose that it may implicate the so-called ‘deep’ or ‘rich’ interpretation of the meaning of a sentence, a statement or a proposition, which are the main ‘bearers’ of truth in discourse [5, p. 881]. A proposition is understood as “the meaning of a sentence that expresses it”, and it can be true or false [6, p. 20].

In discourse analysis ‘rich’ interpretation is supposed to go “beyond the information literally contained in the material” [7, p. 689]. In teleological terms, ‘deep’ interpretation involves the analysis of purpose-associated abstract notions of teleological reflection type as ‘truth’, ‘right’, ‘wrong’, moral validity, etc.

Sentences about the future as future contingent statements are the characteristic material of linguistic investigations in the teleological domain focused on the idea of the final purpose. They are the object of study in teleological linguosemiotics [8]. Though future contingent statements are excluded from Aristotelian logic as lacking a truth value [9, p. 317], we hold that sentences about the future purpose-related beliefs, opinions, attitudes with a postponed truth value may be a relevant object of teleological truth-conditional analysis.

Theoretical underpinnings of the research. In teleology, the notion of truth is mostly associated with non-factual statements referring to the future. In linguistics, truth condition semantics explores truth values of sentences. By truth conditions they mean rules determining the circumstances when a state-

ment, a sentence, “or a proposition expressed by it” can be regarded as true [10, p. 415]. Universally, truth is viewed as “a deeply problematic notion”, the essence of which is determined by a frame of reference employed by a speaker [11, p. 501]. Accordingly, there are numerous theories and approaches to deal with the ambiguous nature of truth. The basic of them are: correspondence, coherence, consensus, pragmatic theories of truth.

Aristotle can be regarded as the proponent of the **correspondence** theory sealing it with his famous statement “to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true”. The correspondence theory is based on the assumption that truth of sentences, statements or propositions can be established by comparison with the physical objects and facts of objective reality [11, p. 501; 5, p. 881].

Aristotle proposed a set of principles (axioms) for the identification of truth conditions in discourse [9, pp. 316–318]. The whole set of axioms and subprinciples is mostly based on the Principle of Contradiction and the Principle of the Excluded Third. According to these principles no proposition can be true and false at the same time. It should be noted at the outset that in discourse linguistics sentences are treated as potentially ambiguous entities with several meanings and interpretations. The Principle of Contradiction and the Principle of the Excluded Third are applicable to sentences when they are used in one of their meanings.

Alfred Tarski in his semantic theory of truth tried to avoid using the term ‘proposition’ and analysed the notion of truth with reference to a sentence. He holds that, when the term ‘truth’ is applied to concrete names, the truth of a sentence consists in its correspondence to reality. When a sentence represents “states of affairs” (presumably, attitudes, opinions, judgements), he argues that “a sentence is true if it designates an existing state of affairs”. Though these definitions are accepted as conventional, he admits that they are not “sufficiently precise” [1, p. 376].

According to the **coherence** theory of truth, a sentence meets truth conditions being a part of a coherent system and an element of coherent web of conceptual and semantic relationships. In the linguistic domain, coherence is supposed to be maintained with the system of related propositions “within a shared universe of discourse” [11, pp. 501, 502. In his monograph with a telltale title “Superintelligence” N. Bostrom demonstrates the essence of coherence and its importance for further development of artificial intelligence using teleologically-related normative concepts ‘good’ and ‘right’ as judgements of moral and ethical kind [12, p. 259]. The system of

teleologically-related ethical rules, moral norms, universal socially accepted laws of moral and ethical propriety is regarded as consistent with the “**consensus theory of truth**” [11, p. 502].

There are different versions of the **pragmatic theory** of truth. One of the varieties of the pragmatic theory is the externalist view on truth close to the dynamic semantics theory, which builds on the idea of continuous progressive deepening of understanding and verification of truth values [11, p. 502]. Dynamic semantics is opposed to ‘static semantics’ in the way that dynamic semantics is interested in the truth conditions in discourse, while static semantics is about “matters of linguistic convention” [13, p. 22].

In terms of another version of the notion of truth in linguistic pragmatics, truth is associated with the speaker’s intention, which determines the propositional content of an utterance [14 p. 3]. The pragmatic view on truth sometimes echoes specifically teleological tenets about aspirations to achieve final goals such as flourishing, happiness, well-being [5, p. 882].

There is yet another linguistically relevant phenomenon connected with the notion of truth, which is called a **truth bias**. It is especially characteristic of political discourse. A truth bias is understood as a tendency for people to believe what they are told [11, p. 502]. Arguably, this willingness and readiness to believe what people read, see or hear is subject to reconsideration according to the principles of dynamic semantics and pragmatic theory of continuous verification of truth values.

Considering the notoriously disputable nature of the notion of truth, its various manifestations and biased cultural, moral, ethical, political and ideological attitudes, the theories of truth based on the monist uncompromising juxtaposition of true and false invited some alternative approaches. They are usually designated as functional “**many-valued**” theories relying on the intuitionistic methods of establishing truth conditions [15, pp. 531–544]. Taking into account that many-valued theories of truth discard the classical Law of Excluded Middle, they may offer a suitable methodology for purpose-related and linguistically relevant teleological investigations. A **functionalist theory of truth** [16, p. 51] allows a reasonable departure from the monist approach in investigations concerning truth values in linguistics. The proponents of the functionalist theory of truth accept a seemingly seditious idea that truth can be “manifested” in various ways and forms, which makes this theory plausible when applied to “moral propositions” and sentences about judgements, opinions, attitudes, beliefs and norms.

The purpose of this study is to provide a survey of existing theoretical underpinnings for the linguistically relevant analysis of the notion of truth in political discourse relying on the methods and principles of moral teleology. **The object** is the notion of truth within the framework of traditional and innovative linguistically relevant theories, approaches, hypotheses concerning truth conditions for the sentences about the future purpose-related events. **The subject** is the ways and means that secure the fulfilment of truth conditions of sentences about purpose-related future events in political discourse.

Presentation of the main material. The problems of norms, morality, judgements and opinions are in the sphere of interests of moral teleology [17, pp. 329, 361]. Arguably, to sentences expressing teleological judgements, teleological reflection and opinions can be applied both classical theories of truth and unorthodox approaches, depending on the grammatical setup and temporal reference of sentences. The truth-value analysis of a sentence about purpose-related events with reference to the past, present or future will require different approaches. For example, let’s take an original statement with a purpose-related content referring to the past: *Three rounds of talks between Russia and Ukraine <...> have failed to bring the two sides any closer to peace* [18]. In this case, according to the existing state of affairs, it is already obvious that an intended goal has not been reached. By conventional standards, the correspondence theory of truth can be applied. The truth-value conditions have been satisfied by virtue of correspondence of linguistically represented state of affairs to the facts of reality.

Dealing with the purpose-related non-factual sentences with temporal reference to the present with implicated potential semantic developments or to the future, when the outcome is uncertain, requires alternative approaches, e. g.: *The royal train is to be taken out of service to save money* [19]; *“I’m here to get (the war) over with,” the US leader said on Wednesday* [18]; *Kyiv wants to be involved in any ceasefire talks* [18]; *The likely outcome of the next election is a Reform government* [20]; *The White House <...> will “put America’s interests first following a review of the nation’s military support and assistance to other countries”* [21]. In this case, traditional methodology alone will not be able to cover all the aspects of truth conditions. Until the goal is reached, these sentences can be regarded as true and false at the same time, and the goal *per se* may be associated with moral beliefs that are questionable, subjective or biased.

With moral judgements, reflections and attitudes the correspondence theory will hardly be effective, but the interdisciplinary methodology of coherence, pragmatic, functionalist and teleological doctrines, accepting many-valued and pluralistic treatment of the notion of truth, may be plausible. The interdisciplinary approach in the quest for a true meaning is known as **default semantics** [22; 24]. Default semantics is based on the 'merger' of methods and principles of compositional semantic analysis, of contextualist semantic theory, linguistic pragmatics and non-linguistic knowledge in order to figure out a true meaning [22; 23; 24].

The true meaning, in teleological terms, is presumed to incorporate a moral judgement on the propositional content either from the consequentialist or from the deontologist point of view, e. g.: *The under secretary of defence <...> is said to have decided to halt the deliveries (of the Patriot defence systems) to Ukraine* [25]. One of the consequentialist views on this message, assessing the consequences, is formulated as follows: *Ukraine is 'left helpless' as Trump puts pause on weapons supplies* [25]. The deontologist approach, which is focused on the initial intentions and motives behind the move, triggered the following teleological judgement: *Michael McFaul, a US ambassador <...> posted on X that the decision to block Patriots was "disgusting and embarrassing"* [25].

The situation concerning the problem of truth conditions is getting more complex when it comes to the key ambivalent teleological concepts representing universal moral values and norms. With reference to the teleologically-related highly ambiguous concepts 'good', 'right', 'wrong', 'the final goal' the traditional principles of minimalist and compositional semantics can hardly be effective enough in establishing the true meaning of a sentence. The basic teleological concepts concerning true meanings and what is right and what is wrong are extremely difficult to deal with in semantics because their analysis involves the whole array of logical, psychological, linguistic and non-linguistic factors.

Human attitudes to the notion of truth and moral rightness are notoriously subjective and dependent on the final purpose, e. g.: *UK's support for Ukraine remains ironclad as we continue working towards a just and lasting peace* [26]. *Speaking on a potential*

peace deal, Trump said on Friday that there "will be some swapping of territories, to the betterment of both" [26]. The sentences in the given examples are about the intended 'good' and 'just' with reference to the final goal. *Prima facie*, these sentences are simple enough in their standard diplomatic triviality for establishing their true meaning. However, this simplicity is beguiling, given the semantic complexity of the concepts 'good' and 'just'. With reference to the present situation highlighted in the analysed political discourse, it should be noted that the true meaning of the idea of 'good' and 'just' for the opposing parties remains to be debated. Specifically, the ceding of territories in military conflicts is a horrendously contentious issue, and can hardly be accepted as just without a protracted debate.

Presumably, to assess the truth values of the above sentences, relying solely on the methods of compositional semantics, will be a tall order. To attribute a true meaning to these sentences lexical, semantic, pragmatic, contextual and non-linguistic factors are to be taken into account: who speaks, when and where, with what purpose, the supposed speaker's intended meaning and the addressee's meaning, and who benefits. Understandably, the list of semantically relevant factors in truth values assessment is not complete, if not infinite, regarding the potential of heuristic and intuitionistic approaches [8, p. 193].

Conclusions and prospects for further research.

The theoretical overview and the tentative take on the notion of truth in linguistics from the teleological perspective have shown the plausibility of an interdisciplinary approach to the problem of truth values in political discourse. The combination of traditional methods of correspondence, coherence, pragmatic theories and of modern many-valued, intuitionistic approaches to linguistically relevant and teleologically-related investigations of truth is necessitated by the profoundly fluid nature of the basic notions involved. The principles of dynamic semantics and default semantics relying on the tenets of the theory of 'deep' interpretation and the precepts of utilitarianism have also proven effective in establishing teleologically-related truth values in political discourse. Further linguistically relevant teleological analysis of the notion of truth in political discourse may focus on the ideological bias of political statements as a constraint in truth-conditional investigations.

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