



P-ISSN 2355-2794
E-ISSN 2461-0275

English-Language Media Discourse in the Era of Digitalisation: Special Mission and Functional Potential

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Abstract

The article addresses the problem of the functional potential of the present-day English-language media discourse and its role in English-speaking societies and other countries where English does not have official national status. The purpose of the research is to holistically understand key functions that the English language media discourse is performing in the 21st century. The theoretical framework of this study includes mutually influencing and complementary research doctrines of Halliday's systemic functional approach, Stuart Hall's cultural studies approach, and the pragmatic approach of Jeff Verschuren. The findings are based on qualitative and quantitative analyses of scientific works dedicated to the English-language media discourse and a massive media discourse corpus of leading English-language print and online media resources. Overall, the research has proved that the English-language media discourse may perform seven key pragmatic functions (political and economic function,

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Citation in APA style: Guslyakova, A. V., Guslyakova, N. I., Valeeva, N. G., & Vashunina, I. V. (2023). English-language media discourse in the era of digitalisation: Special mission and functional potential. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 10(1), 424-446.

Received March 19, 2022; Revised October 1, 2022; Accepted November 19, 2022; Published Online January 31, 2023

<https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v10i1.25307>

educational function, environmental protection and sustainable development function, integration function, innovative function, cultural diplomacy function, and the social function of sport), which help promote a 'missionary' world of democracy and sustainability, affordable education and breakthrough innovations, multiculturalism, national identity and race-free ideology, healthy sport and well-being. Moreover, it is proved that modern English-language media discourse acts as a single holistic information management system whose goal is to become a global influencer and mediator navigating between English-speaking nations and non-English world communities.

Keywords: English-language media discourse, functional potential, innovation, multiculturalism, sustainable development.

1. INTRODUCTION

The German sociologist Luhmann (2000, p. 98) once mentioned that “everything we know about our society, or even about the world in which we live, we know through the media”. The same idea is reflected in the works of a Russian researcher in journalism and media language, Zasursky (2012), who also characterised information as the most important resource for human development. Moreover, Zasursky (2012) drew attention to the reality of the modern era, in which there are global media “one way or another serving the whole world and all countries to a large extent” (Zasursky, 2012, p. 103). The Russian political scientist Lebedeva (2009) emphasised that today’s global media had become new actors in international relations, primarily focused on ‘the English-speaking audience scattered around the world’. This statement of the Russian researcher can be correlated with the modern English-language media discourse, whose characteristics and functionality extend far beyond the boundaries of the sphere of influence of English-speaking countries. Objectively, the English-language media discourse of the current digitalisation era—which is characterised by technology that accelerates the pace and breadth of knowledge exchange within the economy and society (Shepherd, 2003)—may be regarded as a crucial source for recent news, social and cultural trends, new educational paradigms, scientific breakthroughs, and the current political, economic, and environmental challenges that humanity is facing.

Thus, an English-language media discourse at the beginning of the 21st century, including print press and electronic media resources, social media, and various digital platforms for posting, sharing, and discussing a variety of information content, is one of the most influential linguistic and extra-linguistic phenomena of our time (Cotter, 2001; Crystal, 2012; Hall, 1994). Its influence correlates with such lexical units as change, dominance, and power. In this regard, technological innovations, which primarily take place in the English-speaking world, correspondingly make its media discourse space play a pioneering role in many life spheres and guarantee a dominant and powerful position on a global scale. In the theory of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013; Fowler, 2013; Habermas, 2015), media discourse space becomes the substance that determines social changes in society as “implicit and transparent structural relations of dominance, discrimination, power, and control, expressed in

language” (Wodak, 2011, p. 286), which, according to Habermas (2015), is also a means of domination and social power.

Referring to the concepts of ‘dominance,’ ‘language,’ and ‘English-speaking media discourse,’ the first associations arise with such English-speaking countries as the United States of America (USA) and Great Britain. The USA is the most extensive information powerhouse and a ‘huge information factory’. Its information locomotive is the daily American media publication of *The New York Times* (Zasursky, 2012). On the other hand, there is also the British international business newspaper, *The Financial Times*, which, in terms of economic analysis, may be the most important media outlet in the modern world (Zasursky, 2012). At the same time, along with these media, influential English-speaking media sources capable of presenting high-quality information and acting with an understanding of the current level of the world and society development, examples of other respectable international English-speaking media (not always owned by English-speaking countries) can be cited. They are an English-language version of the Chinese newspaper *People’s Daily Online*, the Japanese national daily of *The Mainichi*, and *The Times of India*, one of the most widely read and respected newspapers in India. Therefore, considering the international status of the modern English language (lingua franca) and English-language media resources, it is logical to assume that the English-language media discourse is also acquiring a supranational level of dominance and social influence, actively demonstrating the entire broad palette of its functional potential.

In this regard, the present paper aims to evaluate a systematic and holistic understanding of the key functions that modern English-language media discourse can perform in the 21st century, in the era of multiple innovative processes and the rapid development of information technologies. In addition, the Belgian linguist and pragmatist Jess Verschuren once stated that the structural and functional properties of the process of news reporting lack sufficient description in the tradition of a free press (Cotter, 2001). This statement can be understood as the necessity to analyse thoroughly the English-language media discourse space as a symbolic representation of a democratic institution of the Western world. Thus, the relevance of this research is based on the need to evaluate the present-day English-language media discourse as a role model for the construction and functioning of other media language domains. Its functional potential may become the ‘voice’ that raises important social issues on a global scale. The language of the English media discourse should be observed in correlation with the present-day media of other nations and states. This can help us better understand the globally appealing world of the new media environment, which is actively shaping human consciousness in the modern era of digitalisation.

Within the framework of the presented study, several questions arise correspondingly.

1. What are the key functions that modern English-language media discourse performs? How do they realise their integral action in the media-discourse space of the English-speaking society?
2. Are there geographical differences in implementing the functional potential of the English-language media discourse?
3. How and to what extent can the impact of the functional potential of the English-language media discourse be spread on the media discourse space of other linguistic dominions?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Without first taking into account the fundamental ideas underlying a certain phenomenon, which are crucial for its qualitative interpretation, the study of the functional potential of that phenomenon will be incomplete. In this case, we discuss the meaning of the potential of the English-language media discourse and the success of their implementation at the local and global levels of its functioning through the use of the terms ‘functional,’ ‘functionalism,’ and ‘potential’.

2.1 The Concepts of ‘Functional’ and ‘Functionalism’ as a Mirror of Human Social Life

The first lexeme, ‘functional’, means ‘useful’, ‘efficient’, and ‘effective’ (Macmillan, n.d.a). ‘Functional’ is used in opposition to formal so far as it considers language as “a practical means of expressing meaning rather than as an abstract set of relations” (Flowerdew, 2013, p. 11; Neddar, 2017, p. 58). The positive connotations inherent in the meaning of this concept transfer these properties to the object of reality, whose functional characteristics need to be analysed. According to Halliday (2009), this functionality lies in distinct aspects of its interpretation as text, system, structure, and, consequently, discourse. Applying this approach to our research, that is, to the English-language media discourse, it is necessary to focus on analysing the efficacy of its media reality and consider media functionalism as an instrument of power and influence.

The notion of ‘functionalism’ associated with the attribute ‘functional’ is multifaceted, multidimensional, and requires deeper consideration (Macmillan, n.d.b). The evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin became the theoretical basis of functionalism, the meaning of which was expanded beyond the descriptions of the laws of life of organisms and extended to the area of human social life (Vekilova, 2005). In the philosophy of consciousness, functionalism is understood as the theory of consciousness, according to which mental states are determined not by their internal structure but by the roles they play in the system, part of which they become (i.e., part of the English-language media discourse system).

The American philosopher and psychologist William James (1842-1910) was the most famous representative of functionalism. He identified the concepts of “functionalism” and “result,” calling it “... truth which gives the result” (Vekilova, 2005, p. 104). The social basis of functionalism in psychological science is a mental state which can be defined in terms of causal relationships (for example, ‘how’ and ‘why’) that exist between this mental state, environmental conditions, body behaviour, and other states of mind (Beck & Grayot, 2021). The functionalism approach is similar to the analysis of information processes, which allowed it to become the philosophical basis of the computational theory of mind.

In linguistics, ‘functionalism’ is understood as a set of schools and directions that have arisen as one of the branches of structural linguistics, characterised by predominant attention to language functioning as a means of communication (Butler, 2005). In addition, a similar approach, primarily associated with the Prague school of linguists of the 1930s (Kartsevsky, 2000), concerns the functions performed by the language, primarily from the cognition point of view (related to information), expressions (indicating mood) and connotations (influencing). These three postulates

have something in common with the philosophy of Habermas (2015), who emphasised that the task of functionalism was to ensure the unity of reason in the diversity of its aspects and the connection of expert cultures with everyday communication (Furs, 2000).

With a functionalist view of language, they are often distracted from the existence of ethical motives for its use, putting forward goals in the first place, namely: integration, acceptance, and grouping of interests. One cannot but agree with the statement of Demyankov (2000) that the role of functionalism in language allows achieving one's goals (hidden or open), acting on a person through persuasion, advertising, influence on the worldview, propaganda, and many other various effects. Summarising the above ideas on the concept of 'functionalism,' we note that this phenomenon has become the most important feature of linguistics at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, contributing to the study of linguistic and extra-linguistic phenomena and entities not only as systems but also as functioning intellectual and emotional processes that help a person to systematise and perceive the modern digital world and fully experience its multifunctional potential.

2.2 The Concept of 'Potential' in the Modern English-Language Media Discourse

Moving on to the concept of 'potential', we focus on the etymology of this lexeme and its meaning. In a broad sense, 'potential' means the total of all available opportunities in any area or sphere. The word comes from the Latin *potentialis*, 'powerful'. From *potentia* 'strength, power', then from *potēns* 'mighty', from *posse* 'to be able', from the adjective *potis* 'mighty, mighty' + *esse* 'to be', and goes back to the Proto-Indo-European *es-* 'to be' (Harper, n.d.b). The most popular synonyms for the lexeme 'potential' are such concepts as 'resource', 'opportunity', 'being', 'circle', 'set', 'internal reserves', 'presence', and other words. This entire synonymous range is effectively implemented in the potential of modern English-language media and their media discourse space, turning the latter into the leading digital influencer of the present time in the global world of information, streaming, and analytics (Ershov, 2019).

One of the most striking concepts of modernity, which has a rich internal reserve, is the definition of 'media man' (*homo mediatius*), introduced into scientific and everyday use by the Russian philologist, journalist, and sociologist Elena Vartanova (Abaev & Ezhikhina, 2015). The transformation of a modern person into a 'media man' is becoming the most important feature of the digital society of the third millennium and is largely shaped by the structure and "content of the media as a product of the media industry consumed in the processes of mass and social communication, as well as the communication relations and interests of the individual" (Vartanova, 2011, p. 201). In agreement with the author's definition of a new type of person in the 21st century, it is important to note that, in many ways, the structure and content of modern media publications around the world were formed according to the patterns and templates established by the English-language media industry (bolstered by technological capabilities of Google, YouTube, social media and other digital applications). Therefore, it is logical to make the assumption that in the formation of a media man, there is a merit of both the English-language media and the English-language media discourse, whose functional potential also allowed the evolutionary

nature of man to move forward synchronously with the development of innovative technologies on the planet.

Thus, taking into account the active involvement of the English-language media discourse in many different social processes happening both on the territory of the English-speaking countries and in other language dominions, it seems important to analyse, evaluate and summarise the functional potential, capabilities, and resources of the English-speaking media discourse, which are fully implemented not only within the modern English-speaking society but also spread to other civilised states in the international geopolitical context.

3. METHODS

3.1 Sample

The identification and analysis of the strategically important functionalities of the English-language media discourse and their subsequent holistic and systematic description required a detailed study of a significant corpus of English-language media discourses belonging not only to the native English-speaking countries but also to other countries in which English is either the second state language or is officially recognised at the state level of a particular country. Thus, this study is based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of media discourses of leading English-language media publications and digital platforms in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, as well as India, Pakistan, South Africa, developing countries of Southeast Asia, China and Japan (e.g., *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Voice of America*, *NBC News*, *CNN*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *Toronto Star*, *BBC*, *Financial Times*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *The Australian*, *The Irish Times*, *The Times of India*, *Daily Times*, *60 Minutes Australia*), and social media of Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube. A total of 350,000 printable characters (no spaces) were analysed, and 67 hours of video content posted on the aforementioned English-language media platforms devoted to various social issues were reviewed and analysed.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The research used the following mutually influencing and complementary research doctrines: Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach, which describes the text and context dynamics, social changes in language, and multimodal discourse (Gebhard & Accurso, 2020); Stuart Hall's (1994) culturological approach based on familiarising the audience with the 'consistent code' of the dominant culture (in this case, the culture of the English-language media discourse); as well as the pragmatic approach of Jeff Verschueren (1999), focused on the cognitive, social and cultural analysis of language and communication.

We conducted content analysis (Bell, 2002), narrative analysis (Labov, 2013), and conversation analysis (Sacks, 2004) of the English-language media material. We processed it in a specialised computer program for the textual information analysis QDA Minor. This procedure made it possible to establish the most significant thematic clusters in the modern media discourse of English-speaking countries, which, like

electromagnetic waves, spread in the global media space and are capable of exerting both direct and indirect effects on the recipient—a native speaker of the English language and the English-speaking mentality, as well as on representatives of other mental and ideological cultures. Identifying thematic clusters has also become possible thanks to the English-language Google search engine, which effectively demonstrates the search volume of queries on various topics. One should mention that the need for thematic analysis (TA) as a qualitative research data processing is also mentioned by the Australian psychologist Virginia Braun and her colleague from the United Kingdom, Victoria Clark, who jointly developed their own author's model for classifying objects according to the thematic principle. They both suppose that "TA is a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset. Through focusing on meaning across a dataset, TA allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences" (Braun & Clark, 2012, pp. 57-71).

It is possible to track the most important topics being discussed in English-speaking society at a given moment using statistical indicators of the number of thematic queries that form in the English-language media space. As a result, evaluating the functional potential of the English-language media discourse space and its additional prognostic properties is also possible.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A qualitative theoretical analysis and generalisation of scientific works devoted to the problem of the functioning of the English-language media discourse in the digital era (Demyankov, 2000; Machin & Leeuwen, 2007; Vartanova, 2011; Zasursky, 2012); the study and generalisation of statistical data (see Table 1) indicate that the English-language media discourse can be considered as an effective tool for highlighting political and economic problems in English-speaking countries and on the international arena, a vital mediator of environmental policy for sustainable development in the world, and an active source of fight promotion against the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic. English-language media discourse is also a powerful global educational resource advancing the ideas of multiculturalism, national identity, and combating racial prejudices. It is an active and influential promoter of modern science, innovation, and space exploration. Moreover, finally, the English-language media discourse is one of the most widespread broadcasters and promoters of the sports, entertainment, and show business industries.

The next sub-sections discuss the findings to the three research questions posed in this study.

4.1 Key Functions of the Modern English-Language Media Discourse

We conducted discourse and content analysis of the information dedicated to the themes mentioned in Table 1. We managed to identify the correlation between the thematic clusters that are interconnected in one way or another and work together. It means that the representation of one thematic issue in the media discourse space covers directly or indirectly another relevant problem in the present-day English-speaking

states and the rest of the world. The practical examples in this research provided good evidence of how these iconic clusters can exert a specific influence on each other.

Table 1. Strategically significant thematic clusters of modern English-language media discourse functioning¹.

No.	Name of the thematic cluster	Query statistics in the English-speaking space of the search engine Google
1	Politics	2 770 000 000
2	Economy	1 660 000 000
3	Environmental protection and sustainable development	1 376 000 000* ²
4	Covid 19 pandemic and vaccination	1 180 000 000*
5	Sport	10 360 000 000
6	Multiculturalism, racism, and national identity	1 030 600 000*
7	Education	4 980 000 000
8	Science, innovations, and space exploration	4 892 000 000*
9	Show business and entertainment industry	7 990 000 000*

Source: Google search engine data.

We singled out seven essential functions carried out by the modern English-language media discourse space (see Figure 1), which should be the focus of a particular research object due to their social demand and interest for multiple debates and confrontations on a local and global scale of the information perception.

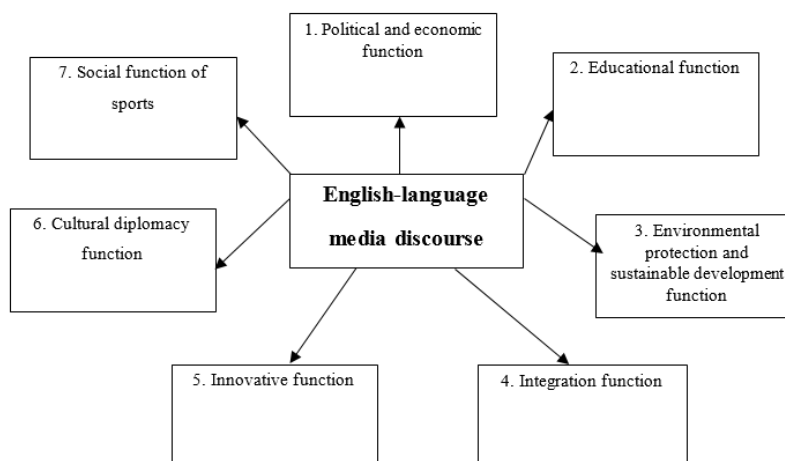


Figure 1. Key functions of modern English-language media discourse.

The functions that help construct modern reality represented through the present-day English-language media discourse are the following ones: political and economic function, educational function, environmental protection and sustainable development function, integration function, innovative function, cultural diplomacy function, and the social function of sport. We would like to demonstrate how these crucial functions work independently and all together when promoting some information in the media discourse space. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on a brief characteristic of each of

¹ as of 2021

² *- total number of requests for the given topics

them as well as present argumentative examples from the English-language media discourse that may prove the essence of their nature and character.

4.1.1 *Politics and economics*

The first is the ‘political and economic’ function of the English-language media discourse, shows that its virtual picture of political and economic reality is a new symbolic type of media reality that affects the political and ideological consciousness of citizens and their perception of the economic situation of the modern era. It is especially true about the American media discourse, which is perceived as a special ideological and even ‘missionary’ project to dominate the world space, which is actively declared by the American media themselves. For example

- (1) ...as the British taught the Americans over a century ago, whoever controls the infrastructure of empire runs the world. (Mitrovich, 2021, para. 2)

Imperial infrastructure means:

- (2) ...the global infrastructure in trade, finance, and technology. (Mitrovich, 2021, para. 12)

Based on the definition in (2), imperial infrastructure is a well-developed global trade, financial and technological framework. This idea is confirmed in the joint scientific work ‘Global Media Discourse’ by British researchers of modern media technologies (Machin & Leeuwen, 2007). According to these scientists, the global dominance of the English-language media discourse is part of the economic and ideological project of the USA (Machin & Leeuwen, 2007). The American news, film, and advertising industries are creating media templates that can successfully adapt to local cultures in different regions. In addition, economic prosperity and global media culture are considered to go hand in hand and cannot be considered in isolation (Machin & Leeuwen, 2007).

The American economist, sociologist, publicist, and futurologist of the 20th century, Thorstein Veblen, associated the economic success of a particular society with its educational basis, which is also firmly integrated into the media system of the state. The researcher viewed the role of the media as a symbiosis of the educational system and a commercial enterprise, built into the capitalist economic system and influencing the society’s perception, knowledge, and preferences about economic processes taking place in it (Grisold & Theine, 2020). The key idea of Thorstein Veblen’s message is understanding the media discourse as an instrument of establishing awareness about education and the economy as two sides of the same coin. Education influences the state’s economic sector, while the country’s economic development defines its potential education system, including an ideological model in society. Overall, the English-language media discourse may successfully inform the global society on the relevant economic issues that need discussing and looking for reasonable solutions at the present moment and in the future. Therefore, the economic coverage of the English-language media discourse is worth mentioning, as it considers the role of capitalism in the modern era, the problem of inequality in society, the policy of income redistribution, and the phenomenon of meritocracy. We dwell on the characteristics of the last two phenomena in more detail.

Tax policy and the income redistribution policy are the cornerstones of all public discussions in the English-language media discourse space, covering almost all continents where English is the state language of the nation. Hence, in the English-language media discourse, there are many phrases dedicated to tax policy both in English-speaking and other countries: ‘the powerful suppressing effect of taxation’, ‘to overhaul tax policy’, ‘tax incentives’, ‘tax reform’, ‘tax cut’, ‘tax burden’, the ‘Soak the Rich’ tax era’, ‘R&D tax credits’.

As for the second socio-political phenomenon - meritocracy (literally ‘power of the worthy’, from Latin *meritus* ‘worthy’ + Old Greek *κράτος* ‘power, the government’), it is characterised by the principle of management, according to which the leading posts should be occupied by the most capable people, regardless of their social origin and financial wealth (Harper, n.d.a). The origins of meritocracy come from the era of the French Revolution, when the famous Declaration of the Rights of the Man and the Citizen (August 26, 1789) was proclaimed, stating that everyone should have equal opportunities and absolutely any professional activity should be available to a talented individual. Despite the positive idea of creating initial conditions for objectively gifted and hardworking people so that in the future they have a chance to occupy a high social position in conditions of free competition, a minimum percentage of the population of such English-speaking countries as, for example, Great Britain or the United States, can still take advantage of these opportunities.

- (3) Britain, which continues to cling to a dual system of a free state and expensive public schools, is a case in point. Eton or Rugby, whose annual fees easily exceed \$ 30,000, cater to only 7% of the country’s student population. Those students secure half of the places available at top UK universities, Oxford and Cambridge. ... In the United States, 38 elite colleges now have more students from the top 1% of the population than from the bottom 60%. At Harvard, the average parental income is \$ 450,000. (Jucca, 2021, para. 6)

Thus, meritocracy is criticised and ostracised in the 21st century English-language media discourse. It is believed that the state should change this system by redistributing taxes and reforming educational policy from a more elitist to a more democratic one. The emergence of a massive variety of educational platforms, including relatively inexpensive training courses from the most famous universities in the world in the English-language media space, is an explicit confirmation of this fact.

4.1.2 Education

Characterising the second important function of modern English-language media discourse is education. It should be noted that to preserve and promote capitalist ideology and democratic values, modern English-language media discourse uses a strategically significant educational resource, which also represents a significant educational potential in the media discourse space of English-speaking countries. We emphasise that in the English-language media discourse, a large amount of information content devoted to education appears every second. The educational function can be considered a key parameter in media content design. Its motto is ‘flexibility is the key’ to knowledge (Schultz, 2021).

Moreover, the English-language media discourse is trying to promote the optimistic idea that the digital revolution in the educational environment, accelerated

by the COVID-19 pandemic, is an opportunity to look at the educational process in a new and creative way:

- (4) ...to embrace the digital communication advances of the 21st century to deliver online education differently, in more creative ways. (Schultz, 2021, para. 7).

Besides, it is a good chance to cut educational costs amid a protracted economic crisis:

- (5) ...to cut the soaring costs of tuition. (Schultz, 2021, para. 8)

Some solutions to this educational challenge which is metaphorically titled The Gordian knot, are being discussed in the English-language media discourse across the world. For example, the media edition of *The Economist* mentions the adoption of ‘a sweeping debt-forgiveness plan’ for students from low-income families in the USA (“Biden spends”, 2022).

The popular British newspaper, *The Guardian*, raises the problem of additional funding into the educational sector:

- (6) ...to compensate for the rising costs and challenges’ that the education section is facing today. (Weale, 2022)

Times of India, which is one of the most influential media editions in India, also says that:

- (7) India’s tuition pandemic needs a cure. (Bhagat, 2021)

The Australian media edition *Sydney Morning Herald* raises the questions of bad underfunding of public schools and mentions that:

- (8) Countries with better-performing education systems than ours have few if any private schools. (“Educational choice”, 2022, para. 7)

Overall, it is clear from the examples above that the idea to reform the education system and make it more affordable and qualitative to the majority of people on the planet is an international challenge and is widely publicised in the current English media discourse space.

4.1.3 Environmental protection and sustainable development

The third significant function of modern English-language media discourse is the function of environmental protection and sustainable development. Climate change is the second key challenge of the modern English-language media discourse, ahead of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, which is also actively covered by the English-language media in various thematic blocks. For example:

- (9) ... experts declared that climate change is a far greater threat than the coronavirus. All the attention that needs to be given to fight this disease must not distract us from the need to defeat climate change (Rice, 2020, para. 2)

The same idea is confirmed by a study conducted by the Russian linguist T. A. Filippova, dedicated to analysing environmental information content in the English-language media. In particular, the researcher found that environmental topics are prevalent in the English-language media, and it can be noted that their popularity is increasing every year.

- (10) Environmental issues concern not only journalists working in the above media but also ordinary citizens who actively comment on published articles and news sections. (Filippova, 2018, p. 97)

In addition, when discussing environmental problems in the English-language media discourse, attention is drawn to the leading discursive strategy of creating global responsibility for some environmental problems such as the greenhouse effect, climate change, plastic pollution of the oceans, deforestation, and other negative consequences of human activity affecting the ecological state of our planet. Thus, in the modern English-language media discourse, there is a shift in emphasis in debating and suggesting ways of resolving matters related to the sustainable development of both independent states and the planet as a whole from the national to the international level of problems presentation (Filippova, 2018). That is why in most English-language media publications (The Guardian, BBC, CNN, Toronto Star, The Independent), the ecological topic is placed in a separate heading, 'Environment,' which is very important for understanding the degree of environmental consciousness of the English-speaking and world community.

The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic that broke out in early 2020, which was first reported in China and then spread throughout the planet, also significantly impacted the formation of the functional potential of the English-language media discourse within national and international borders. It is essential to mention the partially positive impact of the epidemic on the state of the environment, which was actively covered by English-language media resources. For example, the UK's nationwide public broadcaster, the BBC, has posted a large number of video footage on the Internet dedicated to the impact of COVID-19 on climate change (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Presentation of video material on the BBC media platform dedicated to the partially positive effect of the coronavirus pandemic on the environment (Auer, 2020).

Such video plots evoke active responses and discussions on the Internet from ordinary media audiences and in the media discourse space of other countries, for example, in Russia. One of the participants in the video discussion mentioned environmental problem left the following comment.

- (11) One of the easiest ways to reduce emissions is to stop releasing new products you don't need every 5 minutes, like iPhones, and upcycle the old stuff. I drive a 20-year-old car. A standard new car will consume 1000 gallons of gasoline in energy to manufacture before it reaches the showroom. (Ksdogg, 2021).

Below is an excerpt from a publication on the impact of the lockdown on improving the environmental situation in the Russian Federation, taken from the Russian media publication, *Argumenty i Fakty*.

- (12) It seemed that the spring lockdown, with the suspension of many production facilities and the cancellation of air traffic, gave nature a respite. But it turned out that this year: in the world's greenhouse gas emissions have reached their maximum, and in the Russian Federation, they have broken the record for the level of atmospheric pollution. (Pisarenko, 2020, para. 2).

The British researcher Tony Thorne has mentioned that more than 1000 new words (non-specialised and specialised terminology) were created during the pandemic (Roig-Marin, 2021). In addition to this fact, the scientist notes that the outbreak of coronavirus infection contributed to the emergence and popularisation by the English-language media discourse of a new linguistic field, Emergency Linguistics (“#CORONASPEAK”, para. 6). Its main goal is to integrate language services into the emergency response system to natural disasters. Moreover, according to the scientist, not only qualified medical professionals should participate in the fight against COVID-19, but also representatives of the linguistic industry, including through the media discourse space.

- (13) ‘From the experience of China, we see that linguists need to be involved at all levels; they need to be at the forefront of helping healthcare staff interact with patients, families, and government officials to help convey meaningful, clear, and truthful information,’ said Thorne. (“#CORONASPEAK”, 2020, para. 7).

The example in (13) demonstrates the English-language media's desire to promote the idea of unification and integration at various levels of communication between people—representatives of different nations—and, in particular, for the sustainable development of the planet as well as its collective security on a global scale.

4.1.4 Integration

The fourth function of the modern English-language media discourse is implemented in the so-called ‘integration’ function, which contributes to the unification, equality, and coexistence of different peoples, cultures, and subcultures within the English-speaking space and the intention to overcome the critical assessment of national, racial and gender stereotypes. The integration component of the English-language media discourse seeks to resist such emerging social trends as ‘systemic racism,’ ‘aversive racism,’ and ‘pervasive racism.’ A bright example of such

resistance can be seen in the official speech of New Zealand Minister, Jacinda Arden, who addressed the nation and the world community with words of apology for the discriminatory immigration policy of the New Zealand authorities towards the Pacific communities of Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Fiji in the 1970s:

- (14) Today, I stand on behalf of the New Zealand Government to offer a formal and unreserved apology to Pacific communities for the discriminatory implementation of the immigration laws of the 1970s that led to events of the Dawn Raids. (Triponel, 2021, para. 10)

This is an official statement, but it is incredibly emotional:

- (15) We recognise that no gestures can mend that hurt (Triponel, 2021, para. 14)

It was broadcasted in media discourse space in New Zealand and also actively hosted and discussed on other English-language media platforms (BBC, CNN, and media discourses in Australia, Ireland, the European Union, and other countries).

4.1.5 Innovation

The main postulate, which can also be found in the English-language media discourse about the phenomenon of multiculturalism and the coexistence of individuals with diverse life values, attitudes, and national mentality, is to assess and analyse their personal views towards other cultures to understand what exactly their comprehension and attitude towards the existence of various societies, cultures, and subcultures will say about them and their nationality (Jarrett, 2017). One such community in which one can assess the diverse spectrum of human potential, especially in its scientific and innovative aspects, is the conferences. Modern English-language media discourse can be described as one of the brightest promoters of global conferences, where people, and experts from different countries, who speak different languages, meet to discuss in English—the language of international communication—topical global issues of modern society, science, and innovation.

- (16) Conferences are a rich environment to connect with people. (Silverberg, 2021, para. 3)

Taking into account the innovations that periodically occur in the English-language media discourse itself, e.g., the expansion of information channels, changes in the format of representation of news content, and the constant upgrade of applications necessary for the normal functioning of media platforms, it can be assumed that the modern English-language media discourse can effectively implement the fifth, an innovative function, successfully acting as an intermediary in the transmission of cultural codes and the retransmission of the values of the digital society of the 21st century. The same point of view is supported by American researchers of new media Emmanuel Vaast and Elizabeth Davidson, stressing the vital role media discourse can play as an engine of technological progress. According to scientists, media discourse is an important trigger in promoting and popularising various innovations and new information technologies (Vaast & Davidson, 2008). Moreover, it acts as the source of the emergence of a new type of media actors—technical bloggers—who discuss technology-related issues and create extraordinary Internet communities in which everyone can take part in discussions on technical innovations,

breakthrough information technologies, and other various events dedicated to the era of digitalisation. For example, one of the most notable innovative events of 2021 was the broadcast of the so-called ‘space odyssey’ by the American billionaire entrepreneur, Jeff Bezos, and British businessman and founder of the Virgin Group, Richard Branson.

- (17) In the Cold War, the space race was a contest between two superpowers battling for global domination. Today it is a battle between rival businessmen. Or, to put it less kindly, an appendage-swinging contest between egotistical billionaires: namely Bezos, Virgin Group founder Richard Branson and Tesla chief executive Elon Musk. (Knott, 2021, para. 11)

The high functional significance of such an event for the English-language media discourse space also lies in the fact that it was the English-speaking businessmen, representatives of the Anglo-Saxon business culture, which is widely known worldwide, who made the first private flights to the border with space, reaching the so-called Karman line. This event can be considered a successful personification of the phenomenon of ‘soft power’ (Nye, 2013) in promoting the values of modern Anglo-Saxon civilisation, part of which is those, as mentioned earlier, innovative technical events and its extraordinary participants.

4.1.6 Cultural diplomacy

Referring to the discourse of ‘soft power,’ we note that this phenomenon functions simultaneously with another important concept, characterised as cultural diplomacy, which is especially relevant when considering the functional potential of the English-language media discourse. In this case, we are talking about the influence and authority of the English-speaking entertainment industry on the world stage, including music and film show business, and its promotion through the media discourse space.

The embodiment of the power of Anglo-Saxon show business is primarily Hollywood, located in the USA, and the British Broadcasting Corporation ‘BBC’, based in the UK. The media products created by these reputable cultural, commercial, and entertainment institutions enjoy success, and great popularity not only within their national borders but are also actively promoted and accepted in other countries and on all inhabited continents. Such symbols of Anglo-Saxon media culture as Harry Potter, James Bond, Avatar, singer Adele, Doctor House, the Friends TV series, and many other heroes and heroines gained unprecedented popularity not only in their homeland but also in foreign environments, serving as triggers for the creation of local cultural media products and the emergence of national celebrities who embody the modern era. Thus, the sixth ‘function of cultural diplomacy’, which is actively performed by the English-language media discourse, corresponds to the classical principle:

- (18) If a country has a wonderful culture and ideological system, then other countries will strive to imitate it... Therefore, it does not need to use its hard power, which is expensive and less effective. (Flew, 2016, p. 283)

4.1.7 Sports

The same principle works for the popularisation of sports and events of local and international format and importance in the English-language media discourse. In our

opinion, the seventh function of the English-language media discourse, ‘the social function of sports’, encompasses the sum of all the previous functional characteristics analysed in this article: political and economic, environmental, educational, innovative, integration and cultural, since sports communication directly correlates with the most various spheres of human activity.

(19) ... talking about sports is talking about our culture. (Blaine & Boyle, 2005, p. 465)

Referring to the concept of ‘culture’, it is important to pay attention to the international status of the English language, which naturally integrates sports culture into the English-language media discourse space. After all, the word ‘sport’ comes from English, and the official language of all major international sports events (for example, the Olympic Games and world championships) is necessarily English (both officially and informally).

The governments of the English-speaking countries, in turn, seek to use sport as a tool that unites the nation and national identity. At the same time, international sports organisations rely on an ‘interstate worldview’ to maintain their continued success (Goldblatt, 2018). Accordingly, the English-language media discourse is being transformed into a kind of communicative ‘checkpoint’, which echoes information content dedicated to a variety of sports events that attract the attention of the audience to the world of professional and amateur sports and involve a variety of psychological factors and technical resources used to inform, entertain, generate interest and opinions of the media audience. According to a British researcher, Roger Levermore:

(20) [sport]...forms concepts—ideas about the nation, national identity, a national state and intergovernmental agencies that create a ‘global (cross-cultural) worldview,’ as well as the image of how the political world is cartographically, socially and politically divided into competing states. (Budd & Levermore, 2004, pp. 16-30)

The Spanish researcher of sports politics in the modern media, Bertoli (2017), argued that the ideas of nationalism associated with international sports events, such as the World Cup, increase the aggressive character of the state. The reason for this behaviour at the state level lies in the existing attitude that well-planned and organised competitions can resemble symbolic warfare, which can cause a feeling of aggression and conflict between the countries (Boyle & Haynes, 2009). However, military battles are always replaced by peace treaties, and severe sports competitions end up recognising the victory of the strongest athletes. There is the tendency of the first quarter of the 21st century to seek problem-solving through soft power and diplomacy, which is actively supported in the English-language media discourse. Moreover, we agree with the argument of the British researchers, Raymond Boyle and Richard Haynes, who mention that the success of sports competitions and their competent presentation in the media discourse space can increase the authority and competitiveness of the state unobtrusively and peacefully (Boyle & Haynes, 2009).

In general, the modern sport has become a strategically important part of world culture, economy, politics, education, innovation, and media space. It contributes to the formation of positive societal changes, and this must always be remembered and timely promote constructive sports discourse through modern media resources. This task, in our opinion, is successfully handled by the English-language media discourse, which always fixes the paradigmatic changes in the sports field and the promotion of the ideology of friendly sports and a healthy lifestyle in modern society.

4.2 Geographical Differences in Implementing the Functional Potential of the English-Language Media Discourse

The results of our study have proved that the English-language media discourse of the 21st century is a complex information system built on the active use of various digital technologies of the third millennium and consists of many internal contradictions (Sukhodolov & Kuznetsova, 2017) that form and ensure its integrity, dynamism, and functionalism. The functional potential of the modern English-language media discourse seeks to promote democratic ideals which emphasise that freedom is the choice of every person to coexist in a world focused on sustainable development and a healthy, sporty lifestyle; multicultural tolerance and lack of misinformation comparable to slavery:

(21) ...never be a slave to wrong information. (“Let’s work”, 2021)

In a world that promotes a capitalist, competitive system as a natural, corresponding to human psychology and ideology, as well as the transition to a new, innovative digital format for obtaining knowledge, professional self-determination and adaptation to virtual reality as a new form of human civilisation in the 21st century.

Our research has also investigated the degree of the potential functional impact of the English-language media discourse on the media discourse space of countries in which there is another state and national language (for example, the Russian Federation). Having studied the information content and the methods of its presentation in the Russian-language media discourse, one can see a close similarity between the format of news presentation and other information blocks in the English-language and Russian-language media discourses. One of the most typical examples is the format of the program Evening Urgant (Vecherniy Urgant) with its permanent TV presenter, Ivan Urgant, on the first channel of Russian television (“Ivan, divan”, 2012) and the American television program Late Night Show (Evening show with David Letterman) with TV presenter, David Letterman, on the American TV channel NBC. Moreover, the Russian TV show by Ivan Urgant is filmed with Letterman’s blessing (Schultz, 2021). As a result, there is evidence to suggest that the role of modern English-language media discourse is to promote certain ‘universal’ formats for presenting media content in the information field of other states.

4.3 The Impact of the Functional Potential of the English-Language Media Discourse

Modern English-language media discourse is a whole cultural layer, reflecting the ideals of ‘soft power’ and confidently promoting the basic English-language values reflected in the entire spectrum of its functional potential. Due to it, the English-language media discourse seeks to find objective and realistic answers to the following rhetorical questions:

(22) How should we live and work together? What are the optimal ways we can organise society to enhance freedom and well-being and avoid scorching the planet? (Schultz, 2021)

That is, how humanity can live and work further, as well as what are the optimal ways of organising the life of society, contributing to the spread of freedom, prosperity,

and sustainable development. Economic success and global media culture are interrelated and cannot be viewed separately (Machin & Leeuwen, 2007). Perhaps, this is precisely the main contradiction in the existence of the English-language media discourse space itself. The fact is, its ‘missionary’ desire to popularise democratic values in the world is simultaneously combined with the interests of the Anglo-Saxon bloc and its two prominent representatives—Great Britain and the United States (Zasursky, 2012). A similar contradiction runs through all the functions of the English-language media discourse, be it politics, economics, education, sustainable development or sports, mass culture, and innovation.

5. CONCLUSION

Our work has concluded that the functional potential of the modern English-language media discourse is a set of functions-possibilities, interconnected and mutually influencing each other and on objects (subjects) of reality, directly and indirectly in contact with the English-language media discourse space. The functional potential of the English-language media discourse is an integral, dynamic system for processing and presenting information content, somewhat reminiscent of ‘missionary’ work at the local level of information presented and on an international scale.

The findings of this study have indicated seven basic functions of English-language media discourse: political and economic function, educational function, environmental protection and sustainable development function, integration and innovative function, cultural diplomacy function, and the social function of sport. These functions make it possible to generate a development vector for the English-speaking society and the entire world community, considering the vast geography of the English-language media discourse activity. Besides, the geographical distribution and influence of modern English-language media discourse make this phenomenon work as a single holistic information management system. That is, there is the so-called ‘centre’ (in the representation of media outlets in the United States and Great Britain) and the ‘periphery,’ which can include media publications of other states - commonwealths, partners, and satellites (e.g., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India) in the English-language media discourse space. It is important to pay attention to the fact of the close relationship between the centre and the periphery.

Therefore, the circulation of news content is according to the same principle. In the English-language media discourse, information from the centre spreads to its periphery and maintains constant communication and transformation (if necessary). Despite some differences in the information representation caused by the specificity of each English-language region or state, it is evident that the present-day English-language media discourse acts as a ‘single living organism’ with standard functions and goals. It is also evident that its primary ambition is to become a global influencer and mediator navigating between English-speaking nations and non-English world communities. This becomes the key objective of the English-language media discourse space in the era of digitalisation, which can be achieved due to the monopoly on most of the digital technologies and services produced and patented in the leading English-speaking countries.

We suppose that the English-language media discourse of our time may be described as an unusual psychological communicative tool. It can make qualitative and

quantitative changes in the consciousness of English-speaking individuals for whom English is their native language and representatives of other national cultures interacting with the English-speaking media discourse space for different reasons. Therefore, a logical question arises whether it is possible to consider the English-language media discourse with its rich functional potential as a mental weapon of the digital age, which can fire at any moment of international and interethnic conflict. The answer is more positive rather than negative. After all, its influential and missionary technologies resemble the purposeful Christianization of pagan states and gentiles in the Middle Ages.

Consequently, this paper's main investigations and conclusions can serve as a basis for new scientific discussions. They should be devoted to the problems of sensitivity and resistance of a non-native speaker's consciousness to the 'viral' influence of the English-language media discourse, as well as ways and methods of overcoming its dominant effect through the soft power in the 21st century, in the digital era netocracy and artificial intelligence.

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