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On (Political) Catchphrases, Winged Phrases and Precedent Lexis: Political Cognition and Special Wordhood

With words we govern men
Benjamin Disraeli

1. Introduction

The terms 'catchwords' (including 'catchphrases' and keywords), 'winged words' (including 'winged phrases') and 'precedent lexemes' (under which both words and phraseological units are subsumed) are used, supposedly synonymously, in different analytical traditions. The last two are familiar in Bulgarian and Russian analytical discourses of predominantly mass media texts (Balmagambetova et al., 2020; Добрева, 2012; Караулов, 1987/2010; Кузмова, 2021; etc.),

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while the first is used in English (Gupta, 2020; Patterson, 2004; Safire, 1968/2008; Williams, 1976/2015; among others). To complicate matters further, Gupta (2020) introduces the term 'political catchphrase'.

As linguistic analytical terms, the three terms discussed seem to have, if not an identical, at least an overlapping referent in the world. However, 'catchwords', 'winged words' and 'precedent lexemes' evoke different associative interpretations and are respectively based on different conceptual metaphors, which may be indicative of different conceptualizations functioning as alternative construals of a single referent, or they might be evoking different referents. No matter which of these turns out to be the case – given that the mechanism of conceptual metaphor is to use specific, intuitive, perceptual, sensory and familiar concepts to cognitively structure complex and abstract concepts to aid the understanding of abstract ideas – each of the employed conceptual metaphors highlights different properties of the referent(s) and approaches it/them from different vantage points (Kövecses, 2020). The concrete and familiar experiences with perceptual grounding utilized in each case are as follows: 'catchphrases' is based on the experience of chasing and getting hold of the chased; 'winged words/phrases' is associated with either avian species and flying insects, or with mechanical appliances used for flying, with the prototype probably being the image of the commonest bird; 'precedent lexis' is not metaphoric but directly descriptive and evokes associations with historical events, figures, etc.

The question that the paper will try to answer is which of these three conceptualizations of special wordhood is most suited to capturing the sensitivities of political cognition, i.e., which of the three terms most naturally and painlessly accommodates the qualifier 'political' and what this qualifier contributes to.

In order to answer this question, the paper is organized as follows: Part Two discusses the theoretical framework; Part Three studies the careers of two supposedly political catchphrases in Bulgarian online media discourses: *novo(to) normalno* [ново(то) нормално; (the) new normal], and *postna pitsa* [постна пица; lean pizza/austerity]).[1] Part Four provides general commentaries on possible differences in the conceptualization of 'political' qualifying the three terms. Part Five concludes.

[1] For the purposes of the argument, all phrases, quotations and titles in the Bulgarian language are given in transliteration first.

2. The different (metaphoricity) profiles of three (+1) linguistic terms

According to the postulates of conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), it is not language but human thinking that is metaphoric. This metaphoricity is invariably accompanied by metonymy as a reasoning mechanism (Barcelona, 2003, 2011, 2015). Metaphoric thinking can find expression via various signaling systems, diverse modalities, and multimodal products. Language, as the ubiquitous and most easily available signaling system, is inherently 'metaphtonymic' (Goossens, 2003). Careful analysis of metaphoric and metonymic chains can reveal deeply hidden perceptions, conceptualizations, and sensibilities underlying cultural segmentations, since metaphor is "*a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system*" (Lakoff, 1993, p. 203).

The common property shared by all three terms is that they try to move away from the 'conduit metaphor' by evoking different experiential scenarios for grounding the conceptualizations of words and phrases in public consciousness. Each imposes a different notion of the essence and function of words. Reddy's (1979) metaphor of language functioning as a *conduit* for transferring thoughts from one individual to another, where words act as *containers* conveying thoughts and feelings, is assumed to rest on the following interrelated conceptual metaphors:

a. IDEAS/MEANINGS ARE OBJECTS
b. LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS ARE CONTAINERS
c. COMMUNICATION IS SENDING (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 10)

Against this analytical position, it appears that the common denominator in the three terms is the emancipation of words/phrases as something a lot more elusive and elaborate than containers. 'Catchwords' endows words with power – they are either catchers or catchees (i.e., sought after, chased); 'winged words' bestows freedom and independence to words and the power to fly; while 'precedent lexemes' anchors them in a diachronic and origin-related scenario as labels of events with all their parameters. Alluding to the most commonplace and common sense (i.e., experientially, not analytically, grounded) associations that these evoke, the terms appear to simultaneously

reflect and shape public sensitivity to different phenomena (i.e., they do not have the same referent, despite certain overlaps in some of the properties of the phenomena they name).

'Winged words' can be immediately associated with the claim that "(w)ord meanings cannot be pinned down as if they were dead insects. Instead, they flutter around elusively like butterflies" (Aitchison, 1987/1994, pp. 39–40). This may come as a contradiction to the folk belief that words hurt more than physical wounds (according to the Bulgarian folk tale An Evil Word is Never Forgotten (Fabulous Treasure Chest, 2022) or that "a word spoken is a stone thrown" (a Bulgarian proverb). Within these conceptualizations of words and phrases, Dobreva (Добрева, 2012, p. 367) claims that in Bulgarian discourses there exist words with 'powerful wings' that are somehow different from other words. According to Dobreva (Добрева, 2012, p. 368), their differentiating property is that these are words or phrases created by someone on some specific occasion, which then engage in an intertextual flight far beyond their original context and spatial location, trying to sever the connotative associations with their origin and freely circulate, accruing ever-novel associations. The term 'winged words' in Bulgarian highlights the epiphenomenal resonating revocation of words and phrases in various contexts. Revocation significantly enriches these words and phrases so that they become augmented to symbolic indexes. An imperceptible network comes together in such words that is both subservient and resistant to the creativity that is ascribed wings. The wings of such words remain resting until, because of their memorability or the concepts they evoke, someone picks them up again and tries to pin them into a new frame. Such words fly through minds, texts, media, spaces, and times when stirred to life by a picker and create a discursive hypertext which defies all types of boundaries.

The term 'catchword' draws attention to an entirely different feature of special, powerful words via the construal it imposes on the nature of wordhood. This term profiles interactivity as a distinguishing feature, since in the conceptualization of 'catching' (despite or because of its metaphoric utilization) a causal chain of an agent and an affected is preserved in the metaphoric domain mapping, and the interactivity between human mind and word is preserved. The directionality in the catching process is equivocal: a perceiver (the agent) catches a word (the affected) or a word (the agent) catches the attention of a perceiver (the affected). Whichever way this goes, the significant point is that interactivity is involved and the role of a perceiver

(be they profiled as agent or patient) is highlighted against the background of an imperceptibly created hypertext.

The term 'precedent lexis' was introduced by Yu. Karaulov (Караулов, 1987/2010) in the Russian analytical tradition and is used to encompass various types of precedent phenomena: names, texts, utterances. The label implies a significant happening (involving text production/use) which stands out as an anchoring moment. Indexicality in the Peircean sense appears to motivate the choice of the term. Text fragments, names and mentions of events all function indexically. 'Precedent lexis' (Кузмова, 2021) refers to words or phrases that are connected to specific times and events in the past. It presupposes that the meaning of the word's umbilical cord connection with a specific event at a particular time and a specific instance of communicative co-semiosis does not easily fade or become overlaid. No matter what path a precedent lexeme traverses via various contexts, it will invariably carry with it the sense of its initial specific usage. "Precedent phenomena (texts, situations, names and phrases) are characterized by recognizability, reproducibility, as well as by an absolute cultural value" (Mironova, 2016, p. 189). While the first two properties easily apply to all three labels discussed and are intuitively decipherable, the third property (an absolute cultural value) needs to be qualified in two respects. The absolute cultural value has to be culture-specific, otherwise the *precedent* character is lost and the phrase, name, text, etc. acquires universal properties, which is unfeasible. Second, the very notion of construal, as defined in cognitive linguistics frameworks, severely challenges the possibility of absolute cultural values. This latter property actually emphasizes the fact that precedent phenomena come with their own intrinsic value (which has initially been assigned within specific contextual constraints), preserved to a large extent despite numerous transformations in varied reproductions.

Political catchphrases, as defined by Gupta (2020), are trajectories of historical development. In his view, "[i]f the career of a particularly popular and widely used political catchphrase were tracked over a period of time, with its shifting nuances and applications contextualized, a historical account of that period would be obtained" (Gupta, 2020, p. 6). Unlike winged words/phrases, which can occur sporadically and can be revived and used as ironic or amusing snippets, political catchphrases work as proxies for implied debate and contention, which accounts for the use of the political qualifier in their denomination. In Gupta's (2020, p. 6) opinion, we can use

a political catchphrase "as a linchpin for selecting and connecting areas" as a catchphrase's career of maturation is "particularly meaningful at present, in the age of digital communications, social networks, and global publicity strategies." It is safe to claim that, in his definition, political is extended to mean socio-political, and that the properties of what is to be identified as political catchphrases encompass at least i) a function as keywords in William's (1976/2015) sense; ii) constitutive features of public discourse, especially due to the integration of the internet and digital applications into almost all spheres of social life (both formal and informal); iii) accumulation of the kinds of associative linking that the internet's hypertext systems and protocols embed; iv) properties through which it "crystallises an issue" and "sparks a response" (Safire, 1968/2008, p. 104); v) intensive and extensive use within the highly mediatized society we live in. It appears that political catchphrases owe their catchiness to the digitization of public communication, which has become highly participatory, and both individuals and groups "are reframing, remixing, and reshaping media content while sharing it in networks and communities" (Gnach et al., 2022, p. xv).

3. Two political catchphrases in Bulgarian discourses[2]

3.1. *Novo(to) normalno* [ново(то) нормално; (the) new normal]

In his 2020 book *Political catchphrases and contemporary history*, Gupta identifies the following as political catchphrases: 'new normal', 'austerity', 'resilience', 'the 99%', 'the 1%' and 'We are the 99%' (Gupta, 2020, p. 115). The equivalents of the first two in Bulgarian were chosen as a testbed for the hypothesis that 'political' in political catchphrases and in political winged words/phrases and political precedent lexis is used with different senses of the polysemous word 'political'. The difference is dependent on the different profiling of wordhood proffered by these three linguistic terms.

[2] The examples included in the paper are chosen as representative of the two political catchphrases but do not exhaust the intensive use of these phrases as the approach is qualitative-analytical and absolute frequencies have not been calculated. The aim was to trace the extensive (recontextualization and resemanticization) uses of the phrases against the career of the phrases.

As core components of a working operational scope for exploration in the context of Bulgarian discourses, and of their modus vivendi and degree of vitality, the following properties were postulated as essential for identifying a political catchphrase:

1) maturation path of the catchphrase;
2) diverse contextualization (different syntagmatic patterns and different thematic areas);
3) syntactic deviance of contextualization.

Due to the impossibility of using ngrams from Google books and the lack of a reliable corpus for Bulgarian (even though the very idea of a reliable corpus in relation to political catchwords is self-defying), I used the web as a corpus (on the use of web as a corpus, see Gatto, 2014). A Google search on 5 May 2023 returned the following: about 773,000 results (0.37 seconds) for *novoto normalno* [the new normal]; about 9,420,000 results (0.43 seconds) for *novo normalno* [new normal]; about 1,490,000 results (0.33 seconds) for *novata normalnost* [the new normalcy]; about 1,180,000 results (0.33 seconds) for *nova normalnost* [new normalcy]. Although these numbers are not deemed indicative in any significant way, they illustrate another purely technical problem, namely the different forms in which the phrase is rendered in Bulgarian.

Unsurprisingly *novoto normalno* [the new normal] is far more frequent in Bulgarian than *novata normalnost* [the new normalcy]. It has been substantivized and functions as a noun phrase, even though the grammatical associations with an adverb and a neuter gender adjective of *нормално* [normal] remain as possible reinforcers of its diverse uses.

Indisputably, the COVID-19 pandemic is the juncture that instigated the extensive and intensive use of these phrases, but I will take the liberty of mentioning some earlier and unrelated uses of these phrases and a significant precursor to illustrate what a mature catchphrase is.

Chronologically, the earliest use of *normalnost* [normalcy] comes from a book of literary criticism by Mihail Nedelchev. In his 2013 paper *Dvete kulturi ot kăsnata socialističeska epoha (1962–1989) – kulturata na stoičeskata normalnost i kulturata na uskorenoto s ogled na ideologičeskite săobraženiya vreme* [The two cultures from the late socialist epoch (1962–1989) – the culture of stoic normalcy and the culture of the ideology-driven highly accelerated time] (Неделчев, 2013), the author quotes his own 2002 book *Razmišleniya po bălgasrkite raboti* [Reflections on Bulgarian things]. In that book there is

a chapter *Strategii na normalnostta – lični, semeyni, grupovi* [Strategies of normalcy – personal, family, group], where the author postulates two normalcies dubbed the two cultures of the socialist epoch: stoic normalcy and the culture of the ideology-driven highly accelerated time, or the culture of hysterical communist exaltation. The former is the normalcy of people who did not adopt the ideology, while the latter was the rhythm of those who adopted the ideology and publicly proclaimed this. In the political cognition of the author, stoic normalcy is associated with a state of being opposed to the official ideology and not as an all-encompassing standard.

In the same year, 2013, an authority on the Bulgarian language, Stoyan Burov, a professor at Veliko Tărnovo University, had the following to say in a newspaper *DnesBg* on the word *нормалност* [normalcy] and its vitality as a political slogan. The scholar not only discusses the political affinities, objectives or stakes of the slogan, but also comments on the purely linguistic aspects of the word. Burov comments,

> […] the slogan of the Movement Bulgaria to/for the citizens "Yes to normalcy!", despite the good intentions, is linguistically unfortunate and ineffective, since after the affirmative "yes" comes an almost unpronounceable combination of consonants and vowels in which the tongue gets entangled, as if the slogan is meant as a tongue twister. Besides, the rarely used noun is an abstract word to which we have nothing to attach. What does *normalnost* [normalcy] of and in itself actually mean? Much more successful would be to use the adjective *normalen* [normal] in combination with a noun, for example, something of the kind *normalna dăržava* [normal state], *normalna politika* [normal policy], *normalni otnošeniya* [normal relations], normalni dohodi [normal income], etc. (Буров, 2013)

Admittedly, as Gupta (2020, p. 58) emphasizes, a catchphrase is not the same as a political slogan. In his own words, "[a] catchphrase is used to characterize a prevailing or emerging condition or phenomenon (or commercially, a product or service) and is adaptable to numerous contexts. A political slogan refers squarely to the objectives and strategies (the agenda) of a political alignment—a government, institution, party, association, movement, etc." So, the comments above concern the suitability of the word *normalnost* as a political slogan but do not relate to its qualities as a catchphrase, let alone a political one.

In August 2013, a photo with the caption (1) *Novoto normalno v Egipet* [New Normal in Egypt] appeared in manager.news to show the protests in relation to Mohamed Morsi's removal from office in a coup d'état. The photo

is accompanied by a comment "Egypt is on fire, but life goes on", which either advocates acceptance and diminishes any significance associated with the new normal, or it brings absurdity to the latter and draws attention to its paradoxicality and impossibility.

In the same year, another dimension of new normalcy started occurring, which persisted through the years and is still an inevitable presence: (2) *Žega, stud i kaprizno vreme – novata normalnost v klimata* [Heat, cold and capricious weather – "the new normalcy" in climate], which appeared in *Dnevnik*. The dimensions of this new normalcy are defined as "extremities across the whole planet". The normal is actually presented as abnormal, the normal is a deviation from what has been known and accepted as normal, and deviations in all possible directions of the climate conditions are accentuated as the new normalcy.

Two years later, on 17.12.2015, another non-pandemic-triggered use of the phrase appears in the title (3) *Teror – novata normalnost* [Terror – the new normalcy] (*Infacto*, a journal for political culture, among numerous others). The title is not a full sentence, and the identification of terrorism with the new normalcy is achieved without the standard predicate "be". Even though it is a title and as such presupposes brevity, catchiness and bait-in qualities, the equation without the "be" is suggestive and rather categorial. The juncture this time is the series of November 2015 Paris attacks. This may be associated with an indexically charged emphasis of the new postmodernist type of terrorism.

In all of the appearances quoted so far, the phrase has not yet accumulated metaphoric acumen and lacks both the diversified denotative power and connotative overload that Gupta (2020) recognizes for the phrase in English. Parallels between the momentum of the catchphrase in Bulgarian and its wide usage in English can only be drawn after the acceleration of its use from 2022 onwards.

The next appearance, dated 05.01.2016, is in a title that runs (4) *Novata normalnost, v koyato živeem i ni ubiva* [The new normalcy in which we live and kills us] in *inews.bg*. The title is again a syntactically deviant construction since the relative clause is introduced by a preposition which is supposed to have scope over both verbal predicates if we are to make any sense of it (which we cannot easily do). Besides, there is an unexpected subject switch – from we (we live in) to the normalcy (which kills us). This confusing syntactic structure may have been purposefully composed or not. Whatever the case, it startles

and invites a second reading for the meaning to take precedence over the form. The article discusses the tragedy of a double murder and a suicide. The tragedy is extended to a norm by the mere force of quantity – numerous previous murder tragedies are listed, and the idea is voiced that the fact that such tragic events have become a statistical normality is paralyzing.

In July 2016 (in *Dnevnik*), the new normal was identified with corruption in Bulgaria. The title (5) *Korupciyata u nas – novoto normalno* [Corruption in our country – the new normal] follows the syntactic model of a missing copular verb. The identification is marked by a dash. Unlike later uses, where the phrase is the subject and the linguistic elements instantiated in and by it come as its complement, here corruption – the subject, the thing whose properties are described – is assigned the status of the new normal via presumed equality. In the majority of later titles, the new normal is typically the subject, and its essence is revealed through different properties that constitute it, or it is coordinated with whatever new dimension it is associated with. The news report is factual and presents data and analysis from the Center for the study of democracy in Bulgaria.

The phrase thus gathered rather macabre and negative baggage before it became a household phrase in 2020. The scattered uses ran into the inflection point of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, and the phrase (in all its variants) itself became contagious. Thus, after a conspicuous four-year gap, the spawning of the two phrases (*novoto normalno* and *novata normalnost* in all their grammatical variants) is undoubtedly associated with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, even though this was only the trigger, and the thematic versatility of the phrases is far from pandemic-restricted. Since March 2020, the contexts in which the phrases appear can be summarized in the following categories:

i) The pandemic and lockdowns
ii) Business climate, ethics and practices (including financial stability, office practices and new technologies)
iii) Relocation to the countryside in search of a simpler and ecologically conscientious life of downsizing
iv) Art and entertainment
v) Technologies and car sales
vi) Gender conceptualization
vii) Politics

In relation to the first thematic area, the new normal is projected as "an unfamiliar prevailing situation". A representative title sums up the ethos of the new normal in relation to the presence and reality of the pandemic – (6) *Novoto normalno veče e tuk. Tryabva da svikvame. Erata na nepredvidimata nepredskazuemost ne si otiva* [The new normal is already here. We need to get used to – the era of unforeseeable unpredictability is not leaving] (*Capital.bg* – 2021). What we need to get used to is left unspecified, and the unexpressed prepositional object mimics the unpredictability and non-specificability of what is going on. It encompasses everything and nothing; this seemingly paradoxical unity runs through almost all (to the exclusion of those related to medical facts and debates) digitally circulated texts. It appears that Gupta (2020, p. 36) is right in claiming that "[t]he concept of normality assumes precedence over the reality", thus desensitizing us to it; and reality and the new normal exchange places, i.e., which has to adapt to which is no longer of significance.

At the same time, the later stages of the pandemic bring about a change in the conceptualization of the new normal as a static container, something set and with clear boundaries in which unblocked Europe enters. Notably, new normalcy in this conceptualization is usually in inverted commas and without a definite article. Even if it is something out there, it is not familiar enough and is new in a more immediate but distanced way, as in (7) *Evropa predpazlivo se otblokira i navliza v 'nova normalnost'* [Europe is cautiously unblocking itself and entering a 'new normalcy'] (*News.bg* – May 2020).

Meanwhile, it is also juxtaposed to the next normal – in *Capital* (2020) an article appeared with the title (8) *Otvăd koronavirusa: pătyat kăm sledvašoto normalno* [Beyond the coronavirus: the way/road to the next normal]. Admittedly, this updated catchphrase appears to have been borrowed from McKinsey's Kevin Sneader and Shubham Singhal (Sneader & Singhal, 2020, as cited in Gupta, 2020, p. 83), which is repeated verbatim in the article in the Bulgarian media outlet:

> It is increasingly clear our era will be defined by a fundamental schism: the period before COVID-19 and the new normal that will emerge in the post-viral era: the 'next normal'. In this unprecedented new reality, we will witness a dramatic restructuring of the economic and social order in which business and society have traditionally operated. And in the near future, we will see the beginning of discussion and debate about what the next normal could entail and how sharply its contours will diverge from those that previously shaped our lives (Sneader & Singhal, 2020, p. 2, as cited in Gupta, 2020, p. 83)

This next normal is dissociated from the new normal of the pandemic. By implication, the next normal is potent with hope and change to replace the unsatisfactory, abnormal new normal – the unfamiliar prevailing situation – with the metamorphosed imminent situation. This contextualization endows the new normal with temporal dimensions and, by implication, ascribes it dynamicity.

Even though Gupta (2020, p. 61) establishes that "[t]he desirability of 'flexible', 'agile', 'nimble' working practices—especially in the 'gig economy' of temporary or short-term employment—emerged into business vocabulary in the 1980s", this only came in an ostensive manner to the Bulgarian scene with merciless power in 2020 and instigated a reevaluation of work practices and models. In September 2021, the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry launched a one-year national project "New Normal – management of risks to ensure business continuity with strong employee involvement", whose first aim was a survey of what the new normal is.

The third thematic area seems to be a ramification of the pandemic that imposed a new reality requiring various adaptations. Moving out of the big cities and going back to the countryside is considered a solution for overcoming all discomforts of the new normal. In a documentary on bTV (in the rubric *bTV Reporterite* [bTV Reporters]) entitled (9) *"Novoto normalno": Vse poveče hora izbirat da živeyat na selo vmesto v grada* ["The new normal": more and more people choose to live in the countryside instead of in cities], it is claimed that brave young people take the decisive step to start a new life of food self-sufficiency and breathing fresh air in villages. This evocation of the phrase runs towards reclaiming the past as the new normal since the current reality seems to be far from normal. This line of positive valuation of the new normal either nostalgically or with the possibilities of the unknown is associated basically with the possibilities of new technologies, a new working ethos and practices, and a return to simpler ways of life, free from the pandemic and any restrictions it holds for the normal we were used to. The paradox inherent in the juxtaposing of the concepts of "returning" and "something new" encoded in humanity "returning to the new normalcy" reifies the temporality of the notion of the new normal and implies the possibility of numerous changes that may alter both the extension and the intension of the concept 'normal'.

This runs contrary to the concentration of non-normalcy that the new normal is characterized by. This new normal that "they want to palm off to us" (TV debate on the *Democracy* program of *TV 1*) is in dire contrast to

everything we have considered normal so far. It seems that this is the next new normal, which is uncertain and just as new as the newness of the pandemic that disrupted our tranquility of unquestioning a normalcy without clear contents, but one we were used to and felt at peace with. The old normalcy is not specified but it was familiar; the current normalcy during the pandemic was non-normalcy, and the next new normalcy is even more overwhelming since it is not here yet, but it is anticipated that it will reshape everything we have been accustomed to. The ordering of different normals is not explicitly discussed, but it can be gleaned from the contexts of the new normal, which is what we are living in (the pandemic times) and what we are entering into after the pandemic. This preoccupation with the new normal was challenged by the slogan "New normal, the same cancer" in an attempt to appeal for attention being redirected towards problems that have always been with us and remain unresolved, instead of chasing foreseeable unpredictability.

In other words, the thriving of the phrase in Bulgarian discourses fully corresponds with the vagaries of English ones, and Gupta's (2020, p. 25) cogent analysis of the "new normal" as "at the same time describing a settled situation, an unfamiliar prevailing situation, and an imminent situation gives a curiously abstract construction to the ordinary concept of normality" applies with full force to the seemingly contradictory instantiations of the phrase in the Bulgarian context.

Far more straightforward and declarative are the resonances of the phrase in the thematic areas of arts, entertainment (including sports), technology and car sales. The new normal in art and entertainment also stems from the fallouts of the pandemic and is basically associated with the practices of streaming platforms and empty halls, playing without an audience, etc. The world went digital in 2020, and analog art had no choice. Unsurprisingly, it was digital arts that captured the attention and came to the limelight. Digital became the new normal in the arts. Streaming platforms became the norm, just like empty theater halls and their mediated presentations to viewers stuck in their homes. The *DA LAB* foundation, whose objective is the development of art practices in the sphere of interactive arts, net art, robotics, electronics for painters, video art, video mapping, interactive audio-visual systems, visual coding, sound art, sound design, games, mobile phone applications, software art, VR, AR and new hybrid spheres such as genetic art, bio-art, life-art and transhumanism, launched a competition (10) "Stoynost-Cennost (e-valuation)" / "Worth-Value (e-valuation)" in 2020 for digital art, with the theme "how creative artists meet

the challenges of the new normalcy". The new normal for the arts and life was diagnosed as ever more dystopian by Florian Flueras (a Romanian performer and visual artist), a Sofia resident under the international program *RAD.OST* from the *Akademie Solitude* network. He claimed that the way to adapt to the new normal is unlearning.

In 2021, the BMW iX3 was promoted as part of the new normal. Its introduction read (11) "Although 'the new normal' is encumbered with negativity and nostalgia, 'the new normal' in automobiles is related to the future, and it is electric. After a seven-year gap, BMW released its first car of this type" (*Vesti*, 9.3.2021). The new normal gains weight and becomes something separate, having an existence and essence of its own – it gets substantiated with tangible dimensions. Capitalizing on the newness of the new normal and its disembodied existence and its shapeshifting capabilities is obviously a winning advertising strategy.

The corporeal new normal gradually gains power and, beside its own shapeshifting capabilities, it forces humans to change language in order to make it fit the new normal. In 2021, in the *Bogari* media (the media of the hidden truth: on things as they are) a title appeared (12) *Prodălžavat da "redaktirat" ezika, za da namestyat "novoto normalno"* [They continue to "edit" the language to squeeze into "the new normal"]. The new normal's busting of language is basically associated with the forceful 1984-esque replacement of sensitive words and expressions, among which those associated with the so-called gender ideology loom most conspicuously. It is claimed that the absurdity of the words that have been replaced or are being replaced has managed to antagonize even the feminists. The new normal of the pandemic has been used as a front for the creation of a novel newspeak, which tries to impose a new reality which has to adapt to the new normal. The new normalcy of gender conceptualizations is so fraught with controversies and so extensively debated that it requires a separate account (see Ненчева & Георгиев, 2022, 2024, among numerous others). It is just worth mentioning that one of the prisms of the *novoto normalno* [new normal] catchphrase is the dissociation between gender and sex and all the ramifications of the Istanbul convention.

Meanwhile, the new normal has been identified as the cure-all, or at least as the painkiller that we use to assuage the anxieties arising from anything unusual that comes by. This insight into the maturation of a catchphrase in the making was published in 2020 in *Universitetski Dnevnik* (University Daily), a freely accessible digital publication of the New Bulgarian University. The title

was aimed to shock: (13) *Letyaštite ulični kučeta i "novata normalnost"* [Flying stray dogs and "the new normalcy"]. The ontological absurdity of the first part is carried over to the new normalcy by the power of coordination, which conjoins functionally identical elements, which by implication suggests other measurements of identity.

In the thematic area of technologies, beside the advent of *homo digitalis*, security as a service is promoted as the solution for the new normalcy (in *Security as a service – the solution for the new normalcy*, TechNews.bg 04/05/2022), which – due to the networked nature of the new normal and the mass of connected devices in the corporate infrastructure and artificial intelligence-based platforms – requires unimagined levels of cybersecurity. In that sense, security as a service is the new normal.

In the area of politics, the new normalcy is subjectivized and divergent normalcies are antagonized: (14) *Nastimir Ananiev: Normalnostta na DPS ne e moyata normalnost* [Nastimir Ananiev: The normalcy of *DPS* (Movement for rights and freedoms) is not my normalcy] is a representative example. For *Bivol.bg*, in 2020 the new normal amounted to (15) *Novoto normalno: palatkite srešu palatite. I džipka srešu bălgarite* [The new normal: tents vs. palaces. And a jeep against the Bulgarians". According to *NEWS.BG*, the new normal in Bulgarian politics consisted in the rising of new authorities such as *Democratic Bulgaria*, *ITN* and *PP*, whose divergent origins promoted the replication of an entertainment-corporative model in the political arena. Against the background of the numerous protests which paved the way for the new normal, a new model of pragmatism overriding political and programmatic allegiances was launched.

This range of spreading in seemingly unrelated thematic areas of *novoto normalno* in Bulgarian discourses has been presciently summarized by Gupta (2020), in relation to the spread of the phrase in English discourses as follows,

> [e]very circumstantial recruitment of an issue to the 'new normal' added to the catchphrase without subtractions, from the truly global crisis (like climate change) to the relatively trivial (like eating habits or fashion tastes). The 'new normal' of gender and sexual relations, whether seen through liberal light or illiberal murk, was and is not a separate area from any of the above issues. The catchphrase makes it a piece within the whole. Flexible working as a 'new normal' too became but another and continuing surface in the prism of the catchphrase. (Gupta, 2020, p. 68)

As is probably characteristic of any and every political catchphrase as representing a contested space, in almost any of the thematic areas in Bulgar-

ian (to the exception of climate change and digitalization), the phrase marks the two extremities of any of the involved conceptual spaces.

3.2. *Postna pica* [постна пица; lean pizza/austerity]

The next political catchphrase reviewed has persisted, and although the intensity of its use varies and usually accelerates around elections or governmental budget decisions, the extensivity of its use is not comparable to that of *novoto normalno* [the new normal]. To reflect this, the results are presented chronologically and reflect the appearance of the phrase in digital media in the time frame 2009–2024. Unlike *novoto normalno* [the new normal], the number of hits and search times are irrelevant since a great deal of the hits are actually about food and the data had to be manually cleaned.

1. Dyankov: *Byudžet 2010 e kato malka, postna pica*! [Dyankov: Budget 2010 is like a small lean pizza] – *Darik nyus* [Darik news], 28 October 2009

2. *I UK deputatite s postna pica. Oryazaha harčovete na narodnite izbranici na Ostrova* [UK MPs also served lean pizza. The expenditures of the people's chosen ones on the Island have also been severely cut] – *Marica.bg*, 4.11.2009

3. *Postna pica v konstituciyata: Dyankov utrepa Evropa s iskaneto si da složi v osnovniya zakon namordnik na dăržavnite razhodi* [Lean pizza in the Constitution: Dyankov killed Europe with his wish to include in the major law a muzzle in state expenditures] – Velina Hristova, *Slovo* [Word], 1 March 2011

4. *Pica 2016 e nezabeležima – Simeon Dyankov. Kakva pica še ni servira finansoviyat ministăr Vladislav Goranov dogodina* [Pizza 2016 is unavoidable – Simeon Dyankov
What kind of pizza will the financial Minister Vladislav Goranov serve us next year?] – *Standart nyus* [Standard news], 23 November 2015

5. *Manolova za zaema: Goranov makses us pay 16 postni pici.* [Manolova on the loan: Goranov is making us pay 16 lean pizzas] *Trud nyus* [Labor news], 17.02. 2015

6. *Asen Vasilev: Proektobyudžetăt na služebniya kabinet e "postna pica za pensionerite" i "tlăsta păržola" za stroitelnite firmi* [Asen Vasilev: The draft budget of the interim government is a "lean pizza" for the pensioners and a "juicy steak" for construction companies] – *Mediapool.bg*, 23 October 2022

7. *Smrazyavašo ot Dyankov. Postna pica – dori bez sirene. Predreče yako zatyagane na kolanite i danăčna sekira* [Chilling from Dyankov. Lean pizza – without cheese even. Foresaw severe tightening of the belts and a tax axe – *Standart nyus* [Standard news], 2 October 2022

8. *Asen Vasilev: GERB iska postna pica, PP – socialna* [Asen Vasilev: GERB wants lean pizza, PP – social] – *Clubz.bg*, 27 September 2022

9. *Vasilev: Bălgarskiyat narod imashe dostatăčno postna pica prez godinite, vreme e za moderna ikonomika. Povečeto kritiki kăm byudžeta, koito idvat sa bazirani na različna ikonomičeska filosofiya – filosofiyata na postnata pica, zayavi finansoviyat ministăr* [Vasilev: The Bulgarian people have had quite a lot of lean pizzas over the years – it is time for a modern economy. Most of the criticisms of the budget are based on a different economic philosophy – the philosophy of the lean pizza, the financial Minister declared] – *Darik nyus* [Darik news], 14 November 2023

10. *Asen Vasilev: Ako iskate postna pica, pak glasuvayte za GERB* [Asen Vasilev: If you want lean pizza, vote for GERB once again] – *Petel.bg*, 30 March 2024

11. *"Postna pica s buhalki" – taka săpredsedatelyat na "Prodălžavame promyanata" Kiril Petkov opredelo modela na vzaimno vliyanie vărhu upravlenieto na GERB i DPS* ["Lean pizza with clubs" – this is how the co-chairman of 'We continue the change' (PP) defined the model of mutual influence in the leadership of GERP and DPS] – *Dnevnik.bg*, 28 April 2024

12.



[Lean pizza or European financial policy for developing municipalities? You decide on Sunday!]

13.

ПОСТНА ПИЦА „ДЯНКОВ"
НЕОБХОДИМИ ПРОДУКТИ:
Тесто за пица.
1 яйце, сирене, доматено пюре, морков, чушка, грах /предварително бланширан/, кашкавал, сол на вкус.

НАЧИН НА ПРИГОТВЯНЕ:
Тестото се разстила на тънко в намаслена тава.
Отгоре се поръсва с: разбитото яйце, сиренето, доматеното пюре, марков и чушка нарязани на ситно, грах.
Отгоре се поръсва с кашкавал и се овкусява по- желание. Пече се в предварително загрята фурна 15-20 минути. Цялата рецепта:bg-gotvach.com/blog_view_174_G%9FG%9EG%A1G%A2G%9DG%90-G%9FG%98G%A6G%90-„GG%AFG%9DG%9AG%9EG%92".html



[Recipe for lean pizza Dyankov – *Blog.bg*]

14.



[Lean pizza without vegetables? No, thank you! Sofia Division of the Ministry of the Interior]

As is obvious from the uniform contexts of use, the political catchphrase *postna pica* [постна пица; lean pizza/austerity] has not left the arena of institutionally 'political' debates embedded in the discourses of central or former

powerful political actors and has not diversified its connotations due to a lack of extensive recontextualization. It is applied to budget and other financial measures exclusively, despite the elaboration of the metaphoric image by its use in juxtaposition with an antonymic metaphoric expression from the same source domain (see, e.g., 6). The expressive contextual elaboration sends a powerful message, but it is still enclosed in debates of political acts by powerful political actors. Yet, it is the closest equivalent to 'austerity', whose career as a political catchphrase Gupta (2020, pp. 69–86) has elaborately presented, concluding that "'austerity' became a catchword – whether with positive or negative cadences – in media, academic and activist documents, and further afield" (Gupta, 2020, p. 69).

This only comes to indicate that 'linguistic deviance', measured by syntactic untypicality, marked playfulness, ironic flavor, and other features of figurativity (including premeditated metaphoricity), is neither a trigger nor a guarantee of successful catchiness. The designation of both *austerity* and *postna pica* [lean pizza], namely economic policy measures, cutting down on public expenditure, is co-extensive, while their intensions are not commensurate. While *austerity* is directly designatory, *postna pica* [*lean pizza*] is markedly metaphoric and the source domain is associated with a universal necessity in human life (food) and a source of gastronomic pleasure. While the former has matured into a recognizable political catchphrase, the latter is a weakling. Assuming the cross-communal and crosslinguistic comparison does not provide sufficient contrast, the immaturity of *postna pica* [lean pizza] is maintained by the contrasts in its use and in the use of the designatory *novo(to) normalno* [(the) new normal] within the discourses of Bulgarian digital media. There seems to be no special linguistic property that distinguishes a potential political catchword. The question as to the interrelatedness between special wordhood and the political remains open. Besides, 'political' in political winged words/phrases and in political catchphrases feels different.

4. What is 'political': political cognition and special wordhood

The best way to explicate the elusive difference in the intended senses of 'political' is to showcase the difference between a political catchword and a political winged phrase. For example, the 'winged phrase' *lovya snežinki vav văzduha* [ловя снежинки във въздуха; catch snowflakes in the air]

had a marked media presence and is still used (with declining frequency) to indicate 'doing even the impossible to prevent adverse events and disapproval' (Добрева, 2012, pp. 368–369). On 10 December 2010, after serious complaints from Sofia citizens about accumulated snow in the streets, the then Prime Minister Boyko Borisov ordered that the responsible authorities should,

> Wait as of today ready with spades and snow blowers and snow throwers so that even when a single snowflake falls, you will catch it in the air (*Borisov: Kato padne snežinka, tryabva văv văzduha da ya hvaštame,* 2010; *bTV news*, 10.12.2010)

Borisov's 'winged words' took flight through the mediascape and popular discourse. In doing so, they were divorced from their context, and the snowflake came to represent any societal problem. However, it is hard to imagine its association with any augmented social significance that would allow one to identify it as a political winged phrase. Or to be more precise, with 'political' in the sense used in identifying 'new normal' as a political catchphrase. It may be identified as 'political' only in terms of its origin, i.e., being initially produced by a recognizable powerful political actor.

'Winged words' differ from 'precedent lexemes' because the latter term is concerned with perpetuating historicity and temporal linkage. Since a precedent quotient persists, such lexemes function as normative junctures opening new interpretative possibilities but always remain anchored to a specific initiation moment. The precedent quotient has identifiable properties and frames that are infinitely extensible (e.g., *te plesnaha s răce i se pregărnaha* [те плеснаха с ръце и се прегърнаха; they clapped their hands and embraced each other] as a typical representative of a 'precedent lexeme'). Kuzmova (Кузмова, 2021, pp. 96–99) identifies the point of origin of *te plesnaha s rătse i se pregărnaha* [they clapped their hands and embraced each other] as a line in the poem *Hadži Dimităr* by Hristo Botev, a 19th-century Bulgarian revolutionary and poet. The contemporary use of the phrase has lost its initial positive meaning and appears now to denote 'a surprising, illogical (re) union', with basically ironic or sardonic connotations. It does not index augmented socio-political significance, nor does it signify implied debate or contested issues. This piece of precedent lexis seems to have moved so far away from its point of origin as to have changed not only its evaluative charge. It may be speculated that its precedent nature has been obscured and that it has acquired properties that bring it closer to a 'winged phrase'. Such developments feed the illusionary assumption that the terms are synonymous, but they punctuate the phenomena they name in different ways and are not co-extensive, even though there are overlaps.

Both 'winged words' and 'precedent lexemes' achieve their effect through the co-articulation of the familiar and the novel, the established and the contested, by having an already negotiated value and a still-to-be-evaluated drive in public communications. Precedent words and phrases are always marked with special value within a community and are characterized by semantic overload (Кузмова, 2021, p. 95). Besides, they are always authored, or at least it is possible to trace back their origin in relation to a precedent phenomenon (Кузмова, 2021, p. 95); in that sense, they are always indexical, and their symbolicity (if any) is always deictically anchored.

(Political) catchphrases are symbolic indexes which simultaneously seemingly reproduce the discourses of power but at the same time through their extensive uses (in varying thematic areas and discourses) represent a form of counter-power that undermines the very discursive dominance they signify. Probably their Janus-like characteristics prompted Gupta to reflect on the nature of politics as follows,

> Politics remains grounded, as always, in the power structures that reify or modify social stratifications, but political communication has increasingly been – is now dominantly – perceived as a different matter: consisting in making appeals, having messages that catch or do not catch, that provoke or revoke actions and subscriptions. (Gupta, 2020, p. 109)

This modified definition of politics, which reflects the modus vivendi of politics in the contemporary world, is suggestive of the two related but distinct senses of the term 'political'. It appears that political catchwords, where 'political' is used in the sense of concerning a social juncture, epitomize the object of study of "critical-political discourse analysis [which] deals especially with the reproduction of political power, power abuse or domination through political discourse, including the various forms of resistance or counter-power against such forms of discursive dominance" (van Dijk, 1997, p. 11). It is beyond doubt that political catchphrases are constitutive of political discourse. They are salient signposts in political cognition, defined as "the mental representations people share as political actors" (van Dijk, 2002, p. 203). The first meaning of 'political' remains associated with government, power, institutional discourses, etc. The second meaning of 'political' is tied up with the shared social representations of people in connection to the total complex of relations between people living in society, which has become totally networked and digitized. This has inevitably changed the nature of communication and opened the space for everyone to be a political actor.

'Winged words' and 'precedent lexemes' are similar to one another but are distinct from 'catchwords', even though they are used as the closest translation equivalents in Bulgarian. 'Catchwords' grab the attention of users, and speakers catch them as opportune nodes in public discourse. They punctuate communicative networks and accrue added value, both exponentially adding new features with every instance of usage and subversively evoking contradictory receptions in public communications (see Gupta, 2020).

What makes precedent lexis and winged words/phrases political are their origins, i.e., they would be identified as political if they originated from political discourse, defined as associated with (political) institutionally and socially recognizable political figures, events, issues. Political catchphrases, on the other hand, as defined by Gupta (2020), embody a different meaning of political, coming closer to van Dijk's (2002) political cognition to include words indexing any social juncture, which leads to contentious, debatable and controversial communicative exchanges which afford *attributed-significance* (Gupta, 2020, p. 112) to what are identified as political catchphrases. They effect influence at social junctures, mark clusivity and shape affective and evaluative positioning in public communication, and gain accelerated intensive and extensive circulation.

5. Conclusions

Digital communication and social media have made everyone and anyone a political actor – the power to instigate immediate mass actions or influence public opinion. This has helped transform personal opinions of political events into shared social representations of events and channeled communication about them. As van Dijk (2002) notes,

> What discourses signal or index, thus, is not the social context itself, but the subjective mental models of the context as constructed by speech participants. (van Dijk, 2002, p. 214)
>
> Whereas mental models of events may be seen as the basis of the 'content' or meaning of discourse, context models typically control not only what is being said, but especially how it is said. (van Dijk, 2002, p. 216)

Political catchphrases thus appear as relators between textual and contextual models, between the personal and the societally shared. They bear recognizable

epistemological weight and, due to the networked and digitized modalities of communication, acquire the aura of 'political' with their communicative effects of simultaneously propagating unequivocal and dubious sentiments, controversial positioning and divergent opinions. Digital communication and social media have transformed the distribution of power, policy promoters, politically engaged debates, the distribution of shared public opinions and the patterns of communication, where clickbait information sharing and political catchphrases have become indispensable means.

Communication in contemporary networked society seems to have cultivated the taste for political catchphrases with their communicative promiscuity, strong resonances, referential flexibility, context-absorption capabilities, and value-laden malleability. The career of a catchphrase from an index to a symbol, which in purely linguistic terms displays the development of a complex network of polysemies, comes to corroborate Sperber's (1996, p. 2) claim that epidemiological models "explain population-scale macrophenomena, such as epidemics, as the cumulative effect of micro-processes that bring about individual events, such as catching a disease". Probably not without a strong reason, the special words that humans 'catch' are called catchphrases, and their developmental career resembles the spreading of a disease through the population. Political catchphrases with their contagiousness embody the "*epidemiology of representations*" (Sperber, 1996, p. 1; emphasis in the original), which has been strongly enhanced by new digital communication.

Ultimately, it appears that among these three conceptualizations of special wordhood, the term 'catchphrases' is most adequate for naming the public sensitivities of political cognition. It most naturally and painlessly accommodates the qualifier 'political' in both senses (as a point of origin from institutionally/actor marked political discourses and as an index-symbol of shared public sensitivities and opinions with clusivity-neutral properties). Catchphrases exemplify communicative and cultural contagion, as is evident from their tell-tale dubbing in linguistic analytical discourses.

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O (politycznych) sloganach, skrzydlatych słowach i leksyce precedensowej. Poznanie polityczne a szczególny status wyrazów

Terminy *słowa klucze* (obejmujące zarówno *slogany*, jak i *słowa kluczowe*), *skrzydlate słowa* (w tym także *skrzydlate frazy*) oraz *leksyka precedensowa* (ang. *precedent lexis*) (do których zalicza się zarówno pojedyncze wyrazy, jak i jednostki frazeologiczne) są stosowane, rzekomo synonimicznie, w różnych tradycjach analitycznych. Jako terminy analizy językoznawczej wydają się one odnosić do pokrywających się lub zbliżonych zjawisk rzeczywistości językowej. Jednakże terminy te wywołują odmienne skojarzenia interpretacyjne i opierają się na różnych metaforach pojęciowych, co wskazuje na zróżnicowane konceptualizacje zjawiska słów o szczególnym statusie. Zasadnicze pytanie, na które stara się odpowiedzieć autorka artykułu, brzmi: która z tych trzech konceptualizacji najlepiej oddaje specyfikę poznania politycznego. Autorka analizuje trzy slogany funkcjonujące w bułgarskich dyskursach publicznych oraz ich „polityczność", zestawiając je z ich wzorcami użycia w dyskursach anglojęzycznych. Mając na uwadze fakt, że komunikacja cyfrowa i media społecznościowe uczyniły z każdej osoby potencjalnego aktora politycznego, a także redefinicję pojęcia 'polityczny' jako odnoszącego się do wszelkich sytuacji społecznych prowadzących do spornych, dyskusyjnych i kontrowersyjnych wymian komunikacyjnych, termin *catchphrase* (pol. *slogan*) wydaje się najnaturalniej łączyć z określeniem „polityczne" w obu jego znaczeniach. Oznacza to zarówno wskazanie na

źródło w dyskursach politycznych powiązanych z instytucjami lub konkretnymi aktorami, jak i funkcję wskaźnika zbiorowych społecznych wrażliwości i opinii, który cechuje się neutralnością względem inkluzywności czy ekskluzywności. Termin ten ujawnia także komunikacyjną i kulturową „zaraźliwość" zjawiska słów o szczególnym statusie.

Słowa kluczowe: terminologia językoznawcza; slogan polityczny; język bułgarski; постна пица; ново(то) нормално

On (political) catchphrases, winged phrases and precedent lexis: Political cognition and special wordhood

The terms 'catchwords' (including 'catchphrases' and 'keywords'), 'winged words' (including 'winged phrases') and 'precedent lexemes' (under which both words and phraseological units are subsumed) are used, supposedly synonymously, in different analytical traditions. As linguistic analytical terms, the three terms discussed seem to have an overlapping referent in the world. However, the terms evoke different associative interpretations and are based on different conceptual metaphors, indicating different conceptualizations of the phenomenon of special wordhood. The question that the paper addresses is which of these three conceptualizations of special wordhood is most suited to capturing the sensitivities of political cognition. The paper analyzes three catchwords in Bulgarian discourses and their 'politicalness', contrasting these with their patterns of use in English discourses. In view of the fact that digital communication and social media have made everyone and anyone a political actor, the redefinition of 'political' as indexing any social juncture, which leads to contentious, debatable and controversial communicative exchanges, it appears that the term 'catchphrases' most naturally accommodates the premodifier 'political' in both senses (as a point of origin from institutionally/actor marked political discourses and as an index-symbol of shared public sensitivities and opinions with clusivity-neutral properties) and reveals the communicative and cultural contagion of special wordhood.

Keywords: linguistic terminology; political catchword; Bulgarian language; постна пица; ново(то) нормално

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