

**ФИЛОЛОГИЯ. ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКАЯ, ПРИКЛАДНАЯ И
СРАВНИТЕЛЬНО-СОПОСТАВИТЕЛЬНАЯ ЛИНГВИСТИКА
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**РЕЧЕВОЕ ПОВЕДЕНИЕ БРИТАНСКИХ ПАРЛАМЕНТАРИЕВ:
СТРАТЕГИИ И ТАКТИКИ КОММУНИКАТИВНОГО СМЯГЧЕНИЯ**

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Аннотация. В статье исследуется коммуникативная категория митигации в британском парламентском. Предлагается когнитивно-дискурсивная модель митигативной ситуации, описывающая процесс коммуникативного смягчения как трехуровневый механизм: оценку параметров коммуникативной ситуации (степень агональности, статусно-ролевая дистанция, структура адресата), активацию митигативных прескрипций (антиконфликтность, некатегоричность, неимпозитивность, глорификация, эмоциональная сдержанность) и выбор стратегий с их тактико-языковой реализацией через систему лексических, синтаксических и прагматических митигаторов. Подробно анализируются три ключевые стратегии речевого поведения – аргументации, дискредитации и самопрезентации, – каждая из которых реализуется через специфический набор тактик и языковых средств. Стратегия аргументации включает восемь тактик, сгруппированных по трём основаниям: лексические тактики смягчения пропозиции, тактики управления субъектной перспективой и синтаксические тактики смягчения. Стратегия дискредитации охватывает четыре тактики, разделённые на имплицитную и процедурную критику. Стратегия самопрезентации объединяет четыре тактики, связанные с субъектной референцией и статусным урегулированием. Исследование демонстрирует, что митигация в британском парламентском дискурсе представляет собой не факультативный стилистический приём, а институционально закреплённый механизм, обеспечивающий баланс между агональностью, персуазивностью и соблюдением парламентского этикета. Особое внимание уделяется парадоксальным случаям, когда самопринижение или формальное извинение способствуют повышению доверия аудитории, а митигативные перформативы позволяют выдвигать серьёзные возражения, сохраняя конструктивную тональность диалога. Полученные результаты вносят вклад в теорию дискурса, политическую лингвистику и теорию межкультурной коммуникации, предлагая комплексный инструментарий для анализа коммуникативного смягчения в институциональных типах дискурса.

Ключевые слова: митигация; парламентский дискурс; когнитивно-дискурсивная модель; стратегии речевого поведения; митигативные тактики; британская лингвокультура

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SPEECH BEHAVIOUR OF BRITISH PARLIAMENTARIANS: STRATEGIES AND TACTICS OF COMMUNICATIVE MITIGATION

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Abstract. The article investigates the communicative category of mitigation in British parliamentary discourse. A cognitive-discursive model of the mitigation situation is proposed, describing the softening process as a three-level mechanism: assessment of communication parameters (degree of agonality, status-role distance, and addressee structure), activation of mitigation prescriptions (anti-conflict, non-categoricalness, non-impositivity, glorification, and emotional restraint), and selection of strategies with their tactical and linguistic implementation through a system of lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic mitigators. Three key speech behaviour strategies are analyzed in detail – argumentation, discrediting, and self-presentation – each realized through a distinct set of tactics and linguistic means. The argumentation strategy includes eight tactics grouped into lexical, subjective-perspective, and syntactic categories. The discrediting strategy comprises four tactics divided into implicit and procedural criticism. The self-presentation strategy encompasses four tactics related to subjective reference and status regulation. The study demonstrates that mitigation in British parliamentary discourse represents an institutionally entrenched mechanism ensuring a balance between agonality, persuasiveness, and adherence to parliamentary etiquette, rather than a facultative stylistic device. Particular attention is paid to paradoxical cases where self-deprecation or formal apology enhances audience trust, and where mitigative performatives allow raising serious objections while maintaining constructive dialogue. The findings contribute to the theory of discourse, political linguistics, and intercultural communication, offering a comprehensive framework for analyzing communicative softening in institutional settings.

Keywords: mitigation; parliamentary discourse; cognitive-discursive model; speech behaviour strategies; mitigation tactics; British linguoculture

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Parliamentary discourse, being a central genre of political communication, is characterized by agonality, ritual organization, and strict communicative norms. British parliamentary culture, which has evolved over centuries, places particular emphasis on the principle of politeness, creating a favorable institutional environment for the functioning of mitigation strategies. In contemporary linguistics, mitigation is understood as the use of linguistic means and methods aimed at reducing the illocutionary force of an utterance, minimizing communicative risks, and preserving the “face” of communicants [1, 2, 3, 4]. Despite a considerable number of studies, the systemic

organization and cognitive mechanisms of mitigation remain a subject of debate, and its specificity in parliamentary discourse has not received adequate attention.

For a systematic description of parliamentarians' speech behaviour, the study proposes a cognitive-discursive model of the mitigation situation. Within this approach, the process of communicative softening is viewed as a sequential progression through three cognitive levels. At the first level, the parameters of the communicative situation are assessed – the degree of agonality, status-role distance between communicants, and the structure of the addressee (opponent, parliamentarians as a verdictive instance, public opinion as a conclusive addressee). The result of this assessment is the activation of a corresponding set of mitigation prescriptions: anti-conflict, non-categoricalness, non-impositivity, glorification, or emotional restraint [3]. At the second level, depending on the communicative goal, one of three strategies is selected – argumentation, discrediting, or self-presentation. At the third level, a specific tactic is chosen and linguistically realized through a system of mitigators – lexical, grammatical, and syntactic means of softening [2, 5]. This model enables not only the systematization of observed patterns but also the prediction of the choice of mitigation means depending on the communicative context. Let us turn to a sequential analysis of each of the three identified strategies.

The first of the strategies under consideration – the strategy of mitigative argumentation – is oriented toward modifying the propositional content of the utterance and reducing the categoricalness of the assertion. In conditions of high persuasiveness and responsibility for the reliability of information, the parliamentarian seeks to present the thesis not as an indisputable fact, but as a subjective opinion, assumption, or probabilistic assessment. Within this strategy, eight tactics are identified, which can be grouped according to three criteria depending on which aspect of the utterance the softening effect targets.

First, it is necessary to examine lexical tactics of propositional softening, as they are the most frequent and diverse in composition. These include the tactic of softening presupposition, realized through modal adverbs *perhaps*, *maybe*, *possibly*. An

illustrative example is the speech of Lieut-Colonel Sir Arthur Heneage in the House of Commons (1930), where the speaker discusses the effect of the Gas Undertakings Order on unemployment: *Perhaps there is some plot behind it to connect this with the Coal Bill*. The adverb *perhaps* introduces a speculative assumption cautiously, creating an effect of hypotheticality and leaving room for alternative interpretations while implicitly criticizing the Government's motives.

Alongside the tactic of softening presupposition, the tactic of approximation is actively employed, realized through adverbs *approximately*, *roughly*, *nearly*. These means allow operating with imprecise data, relieving the speaker of responsibility for the absolute accuracy of the assertion. Mr. George Trevelyan's speech (1877) contains a characteristic example concerning military expenditure: *our Army consisted, speaking roughly, of 200,000 men in time of peace, while we had very nearly 400 generals*. The mitigators *roughly* and *nearly* signal to the audience that the subsequent figures are approximate, allowing the speaker to criticize the excessive number of generals without being held to exact statistical precision. In turn, the tactic of semantic limitation (*a bit*, *a little*, *somewhat*) reduces the intensity of a negative evaluation without changing its essence. In debates on the Disqualification Acts (2000), Reverend Dr. Ian Paisley states: *I think that there is a bit of confusion here*, using the diminutive *a bit* to soften criticism of the Minister's statement and to create space for clarification.

In addition to lexical means, tactics of managing subjective perspective play an important role in the implementation of the argumentation strategy. This group is represented by the tactic of indefinite reference, realized through collocations with *some* (*some people*, *some cases*, *some sort of*), as well as the tactic of responsibility sharing, where the pronoun *we* in mitigative performatives (*we do not wish*, *we are unable to support*) "blurs" the authorship of the utterance. In debates on the Dangerous Dogs Bill (1991), Mr. Michael Shersby states: *I am not sure that I command the agreement of the House in saying that we do not wish such a situation to develop here*. The pronoun *we* and the mitigative performative *do not wish* allow the speaker

to express a position that might be controversial while presenting it as a shared concern rather than a personal opinion.

Furthermore, the argumentation strategy includes syntactic tactics of softening, among which the tactic of directive softening (modal verbs *could*, *would*, *may*, *might*, passive constructions) and the tactic of disagreement softening (conditional constructions combined with speech acts of gratitude) stand out. In the House of Commons debates on the London Underground Victoria Bill (1990), Mr. Peter Snape uses the construction: *I should be grateful if he would use his habitual contacts with London Underground management to see whether anything can be done about the problem*. The conditional construction transforms a request for action into a polite expression of gratitude, minimizing the communicative pressure on the addressee. In debates on Greenwich Hospital (1957), Mr. Michael Maitland Stewart addresses the executive branch with a query: *Could we possibly be told if there are any local education authorities which have proved unwilling to pay fees for any boys for whom they are responsible who are going to this school?* The modal verb *could*, the adverb *possibly*, and the passive construction *be told* create an effect of maximum delicacy, allowing the speaker to pose a potentially critical question while formally remaining within the bounds of a polite inquiry. Thus, the argumentation strategy demonstrates a wide range of mitigation means, the choice of which is determined by specific parameters of the communicative situation.

Turning to the analysis of the second strategy, it should be noted that the strategy of mitigative discrediting is aimed at regulating the evaluative modus of the utterance, primarily in situations of expressing criticism, disagreement, or negative reaction to the actions of political opponents. In parliamentary practice, where direct confrontation acts as an institutionally conditioned element of communication, this strategy allows criticism to be carried out without violating norms of politeness. Within the strategy, four tactics are identified, which can be grouped into two categories depending on the mode of presenting the critical assessment.

The first group consists of tactics of implicit criticism, including the tactic of implicit evaluation presentation, realized through rhetorical questions, including those with negation (*is that not due to, is it not a fact*) and the interrogative word Why, as well as the tactic of litotic softening (*it is not very nice*). In debates on housing policy (1980), Mr. Clive Soley uses a rhetorical question: *Is that not due to his policy and the moratorium?* The question *Is that not due to* masks the accusation as an invitation to explain, leaving the addressee the opportunity to offer an alternative interpretation while implicitly holding the Government responsible for the housing crisis.

The litotic construction *it is not very nice* in debates on Cyprus (1959) allows acknowledging a problematic situation in a softened form: *it is not very nice for some of our finest troops to be engaged on police duties*. The speaker does not deny the negative nature of the situation but diminishes its intensity, allowing criticism of the military deployment while maintaining respect for the troops and avoiding direct confrontation with the Government.

The second group within the discrediting strategy consists of tactics of procedural criticism, including the tactic of indirect indication of error (softened request to the Speaker – *perhaps you could*) and the tactic of disagreement softening (mitigative performatives with modal verbs *might, could, conditional constructions*). In the Debate on the Address (1950), Mr. Boothby contains an address to the Speaker: *perhaps you could indicate whether there is any such possibility*. The mitigator *perhaps you could* allows expressing concern about the fishing industry crisis while formally remaining within the framework of a procedural request to the Speaker. Lord Drumalbyn (1971) uses an expanded system of softening: *perhaps I may suggest to the House that the two sides should be invited to go through it*. The mitigative performative *I may suggest* and the adverb *perhaps* create an effect of maximum politeness when expressing a recommendation to the House.

Finally, the third of the identified strategies – the strategy of mitigative self-presentation – is oriented toward managing subjective perspective and distributing

responsibility for the content of the utterance. In parliamentary discourse, characterized by a high degree of social responsibility, the communicant's ability to adjust the degree of expression of the subjective component acquires significant importance. Within the strategy, four tactics are identified, which can also be grouped into two categories depending on the direction of the mitigative impact.

Tactics of subjective reference include the tactic of subjectivity expression, realized through mitigative performatives (*perhaps I may suggest, I should like to, I would suggest*) and the statement of incompetence (*I am in no way an expert*), as well as the tactic of indirect indication of error, where accusation is masked as an apology or polite request (*Could I ask, May I beg, I apologise, I must confess*). In debates on the Ecclesiastical Titles Assumption Bill (1851), Mr. Roundell Palmer uses the construction: *I would suggest that it is a difficulty which lies at the root, not of the question before us, but of the whole previous question*. The performative *I would suggest* creates an effect of polite advice rather than a categorical assertion. The mitigative performative *I apologise* in Sir Matthew Ridley's speech (1898) is used to soften criticism: *I apologise for raising the ire of the honourable Gentleman by describing what had occurred as trades union outrages*. A formal apology masks the potential offense, allowing the speaker to maintain a constructive tone while acknowledging the contentious nature of the description. The statement of incompetence in the House of Lords debates on Marine Science and Technology (1969): *I would, with some diffidence and as in no way an expert in such matters, venture to suggest* – paradoxically increases audience trust, lowering expectations and creating an image of a modest orator.

The second group within the self-presentation strategy consists of tactics of status regulation, including the tactic of glorification, aimed at raising the status of the addressee through speech acts of gratitude (*I thank*), expressive syntactic constructions (*what a pleasure*), predicatives of self-deprecation (*I am relatively new*), introductory constructions (*with permission*), as well as the tactic of subjective refocusing, realized through passive constructions (*a mistake was made, it has been decided*) and

conditional caveats (*if I am not misinformed*). In debates on the Isles of Scilly (1953), Mr. R.A. Butler uses the construction: *I should like to say what a pleasure it was for me to meet the deputation from the Isles*. The exclamatory construction emphasizes a positive attitude and creates a favorable communicative environment, demonstrating respect for the islanders and their concerns. The self-deprecation predicative in Mr. Ian Pearson's speech (1996): *I confess that I am relatively new to the concept of landfill taxes* allows lowering audience expectations before making critical remarks, positioning the speaker as humble and open to correction.

In the study by P.A. Akhmetzyanova devoted to the comparative analysis of propositional mitigation in German and British political discourse, it is noted that in British parliamentary discourse the strategy of assertive mitigation is realized through ten tactics, among which the most frequent is the tactic of expressing the subjectivity of the utterance (17%), realized through the means of the modus of supposition. An interesting feature of British linguoculture is also the manifestation of the self-deprecation tactic, constituting 9% of the total number of cases, which reflects the high value of the cultural script of self-deprecation in English communicative culture, where it is perceived as a way of creating a friendly atmosphere and reducing tension in communication [6]. These observations are consistent with the results of the present study, in which self-deprecation and subjectivity expression tactics also occupy a significant place in the repertoire of mitigation means used by British parliamentarians.

The conducted research allows asserting that mitigation in British parliamentary discourse represents a systemically organized, cognitively conditioned mechanism, rather than a heterogeneous set of disparate devices. The proposed cognitive-discursive model, describing the softening process as a three-level transition from situation assessment through activation of prescriptions to strategy selection and tactical-linguistic realization, enables systematization of observed patterns of speech behaviour. The argumentation strategy is realized through lexical, subjective-perspective, and syntactic tactics, with non-categoricalness, anti-conflict, and non-

impositivity as dominant prescriptions. The discrediting strategy, realized through tactics of implicit and procedural criticism, serves institutionally acceptable forms of expressing disagreement, activating prescriptions of anti-conflict and emotional restraint. The self-presentation strategy, realized through tactics of subjective reference and status regulation, serves to create the image of a modest, competent, and institutionally loyal politician, activating prescriptions of glorification, non-categoricalness, and anti-conflict. In some cases, mitigation tactics function paradoxically: the statement of one's own incompetence or a formal apology contribute to increasing audience trust, while mitigative performatives allow raising serious objections while maintaining the constructive tone of dialogue. Mitigation in British parliamentary discourse acts not as a facultative stylistic device, but as a pragmatically conditioned mechanism ensuring a balance between persuasiveness, cooperativeness, and status-role constraints.

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