

## THE SEMANTIC ANALYSES OF ARMENIAN GENOCIDE IN THE AMERICAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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*The article is devoted to the events of Armenian Genocide from linguistic point of view. The historical events represented in the American political discourse are analyzed and represented from the event-semantic point of view. Doing semantic analyses of the events represented in the American political discourse, we come to use such notions as logical existential quantifications, predicates, arguments as well as thematic roles (agent, patient) to express the deep meaning of the event represented by the verb used in the discourse. To reveal the deep meaning of the verb we also come to use such parameters as CAUSE or BECOME predicates. We make an attempt to reveal the essence of the political discourse by analyzing the events pointed at issue<sup>1</sup>.*

Nowadays political discourse is considered an essential study and research area within the framework of politics and mainly within that of linguistics. Political discourse analyses are held by numerous linguists aiming to find out the essence and deep meaning of the political text and talk. Political discourse analyst is mainly considered with the study of politically-related speeches and writings which are banned to certain events or topics.

Armenian genocide is one of the most tragic event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and has been pointed at issue by many political forces and states. It seems to be under discussion till its recognition as the latter is a must and a kind of moral duty. I posit this claim taking into consideration the fact of the U.S House Joint Resolution 148, adopted on April 8, 1975 according to which April 24 was designated as “National Day of Remembrance of Man's Inhumanity to Man”, and the President of the United States was authorized and requested to issue a proclamation calling upon the people of the United States to observe such day as a day of remembrance for all the victims of genocide, especially those of Armenian ancestry<sup>2</sup>.

These tragic events are mainly discussed from the historical, political and legal point of view. My objective is to discuss them mainly from the linguistic point of view and especially from the deep semantic point of view by revealing their political essence. I share those linguists' opinions about the *event semantics* who study historical and life events from linguistic standpoint by adopting the idea that the *event* is a grammatical category and is considered a logical parameter for explaining the deep meaning of the utterance uttered by politicians.

In semantic theories the notion of events is used in different ways but the term event-based semantics mainly comes from those views which share the proposal of Davidson (1967) that certain predicates take an implicit variable<sup>3</sup> over events as an argument<sup>4</sup>. This event argument is

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<sup>1</sup> The idea of the following research method and the topic in general is suggested by the Doctor of Philology, Professor Suren Zolyan.

<sup>2</sup> H. Res. 106 (110th): Affirmation of the United States Record on the Armenian Genocide Resolution

<sup>3</sup> A symbol or name that stands for a value. For example, in the expression  $x + y$ ,  $x$  and  $y$  are variables.

<sup>4</sup> In linguistics, an **argument** is an expression that helps complete the meaning of a predicate. Most predicates take one, two, or three arguments. A predicate and its arguments form a *predicate-argument structure*. The discussion of predicates and arguments is associated most with (content) verbs and noun phrases (NPs), although other syntactic categories can also be construed as predicates and as arguments. Arguments must be distinguished from adjuncts. While a predicate needs its arguments to complete its meaning, the adjuncts that appear with a predicate are optional.

accommodated by analyzing the predicate as having one more argument place than is assumed in traditional analyses<sup>5</sup>.

The semantic literature has further contributed to the realization that the grammar recognizes the existence of complex events having an internal structure. Numerous streams of research have converged on the idea that complex events consist of inner and outer events where the outer one is associated with causation and agency<sup>6</sup> whereas the inner one is associated with telicity<sup>7</sup> and change of state.

In my analyses I come to use the predicate CAUSE to represent the relation between a causer argument x and an inner expression involving a change of state in the argument y. The majority of researchers doing their research in this field follow this strategy and most of them represent the change of state with the predicate BECOME; e.g. wipe the floor clean

X CAUSE [y BECOME (AT) z] BY[x ‘wipe y’]] (Levin and Rapaoport 1988, p.2,  
example 2a)

With the help of these predicates verb meaning is represented by decomposing the predicate into more basic predicates. Event-based semantic analyses are held within the framework of generative semantics and such kind of representations put semantics into the syntax and eventual representation is considered to be both semantic and syntactic representation. McCawley represents the verb *kill* within generative semantics like this:

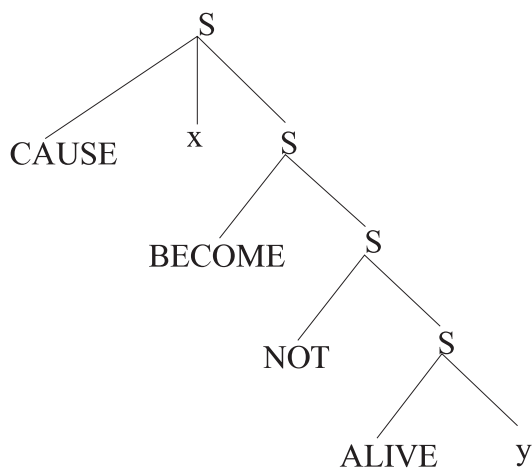


FIGURE 1 McCawley 1968, p.73, Figure3.

American political discourse about the events of Armenian genocide is very complicated

<sup>5</sup> Davidson D., *The logical form of Action sentences*, Oxford University Press 1967, pp. 105-122.

<sup>6</sup> In linguistics a **grammatical agent** is the cause or initiator of an event. *Agent* is the name of the thematic role (also known as the thematic relation). The word comes from the present participle *agens*, *agentis* (“the one doing”) of the Latin verb *agere*, to “do” or “make”. The grammatical agent is often confused with the subject but these two notions are quite distinct: the former is based explicitly on its relationship to the action or event expressed by the verb, whereas the latter is based on the flow of information, word order, and importance to the sentence.

<sup>7</sup> In linguistics, **telicity** (from the Greek *telos* meaning “end” or “goal”) is the property of a verb or a verb phrase that presents an action or event as being complete in some sense. A verb or verb phrase with this property is said to be *telic*, while a verb or verb phrase that presents an action or event as being *incomplete* is said to be *atelic*.

from the political point of view but the world's political positions give a great importance to it on this issue. The United States of America is considered the most powerful political force in the world and every year on April 24 the whole world and especially Armenian nation expects American President to pronounce the word "*genocide*" by putting spurs for the recognition of these terrific events all over the world.

In the U.S House Joint Resolution 148, adopted on April 8, 1975 according to which April 24 was designated as 'National Day of Remembrance of Man's Inhumanity to Man' from the viewpoint of event-semantics the linguistic expression *Man's Inhumanity to Man* is considered a single event, i.e. there has been carried out an inhuman action. It is a complex event consisting of outer and inner events. In the outer event man is the agent(the cause or initiator of an event) which causes change of state in the argument *Man*. The argument structure for a word is a minimal specification of its lexical semantics. Much research has been conducted on the assumption that argument structure is the strongest determinant on the acquisition of verb meaning.[Gleitman,1990,Pinker 1989]

### EVENT

INHUMANITY – cruel, evil action<sup>8</sup>

ARGSTR = ARG1 [Animate individual (MAN) ]

ARG2 [Physical essence (MAN)

∃ e INHUMANITY (Man, man', e)

∃ e (CRUEL ACTION( e) & AGENT (man, e) & PATIENT (man', e)

Agent CAUSE Patient BECOME ON (evil, tyranny) STATE

The predicate CAUSE is represented as a relation between a causer argument x(Man1) and inner expression involving a change of state in the argument y(Man2). The change of state is represented with the predicate BECOME.

By looking through and studying the USA official records on this issue we come across numerous resolutions, congressional reports where the events of 1915 are mainly estimated as **massacres, atrocities, misery**.

In the U.S Senate resolution 359 , for instance, it is stated that *the Senate of foreign relations have clearly established the truth of the **reported massacres** and other **atrocities** from which the Armenian people have suffered*<sup>9</sup>. In the Senate Concurrent resolution 12, it is *resolved by the Senate, that in view of the **misery, wretchedness and hardships** which these people are suffering...*<sup>10</sup> In the Concurrent resolution 12, the events are described as deplorable conditions of **insecurity, starvation and misery**: *The people of the United States are deeply impressed by the deplorable conditions of insecurity, starvation and misery now prevalent in Armenia. (U.S. Senate Concurrent Resolution 12 February 9, 1916)*

From the viewpoint of the event semantics these are all separate events each having their specific event structure. Coming to generative tradition I posit that the word **massacre** is decomposed like the word **kill**. So we have the following structure:

WORD: Massacres- to massacre (verb)

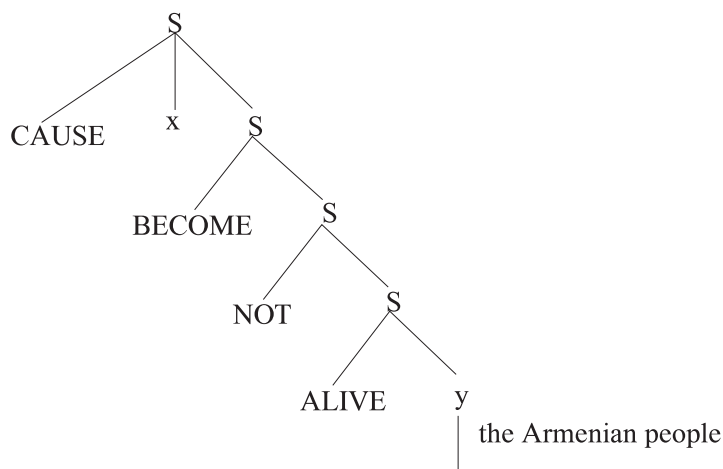
ARGSTR= ARG1=animate-individual 0

ARG2= physical essence /Armenian people/

<sup>8</sup> Webster's New World Treasures, prepared by Charlton G. Laird, The United States of America, 1971, 315p

<sup>9</sup> U.S Senate resolution 359, May 11, 1920

<sup>10</sup> U.S Senate concurrent resolution 12, February 9, 1916, <http://www.armenian-genocide.org> 20.01.2014



In CAUSE predicate argument, a causer argument is not represented, i.e. the outer event is absent but the inner one undergoes change of state by *becoming not alive*.

Another event comes to be **atroc**ity, which is defined as *a cruel and a violent act*<sup>11</sup>. It is a fact and as it stated in their discourse *it is true* that Armenian people have suffered from these atrocities, i.e. the inner expression undergoes change of state, but the outer event, i.e. the causer argument is again missing.

It is a well-known fact that context crucially influences the structure and processing of text and talk. Contexts are able to function as the interface between situational and social structures and discourse structures become the subjectively represent relevant aspects of situations and society and directly interfere the mental processes of discourse production and comprehension. Teun A. Van Dijk once stated that a well-known generative grammar should include a pragmatic component which he further called a *Context Grammar*. Context grammars must specify how given pragmatic structures, i.e. contexts impose constraints upon the structure of utterances [Dijk, 1972:57]. Context grammar accounts how the surface structure, the meaning and the reference of sentences are determined by the specific properties of the context, such as its topological structure (place and time of the utterance-act) and the mental structures of the speech participants; knowledge, belief, intention, ability, etc.. From the viewpoint of context grammar, topological parameters may present social roles and relations as well. Adopting this view, complex events are represented both by outer and inner events where the outer events represent the place or time of the event; *Starvation is prevalent in Armenia now/ Insecurity is prevalent in Armenia now*.

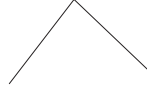
Starvation  $\longrightarrow$  to starve (verb )  
 ARDSTR = ARG1 = time /place  
 ARG2 = state  
 Shadow-ARG= Armenian people

In the argument of CAUSE predicate, a certain time (now) as well as place(in Armenia) comes to be used as an argument for the verb *to starve* i.e. starving condition is prevalent in Armenia and it is prevalent *now*; as mentioned in discourse. The indexical expression *now* points out the fact that discourse makers know what time it is, who is the causer agent of those

<sup>11</sup> Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary , by A.S Hornby, Oxford University Press 2005, p. 81.

conditions and who comes to that state. It is a fact that only animate being starves and in the situation of American discourse these beings come to be Armenian people. Here we find out the occurrences of shadow arguments<sup>12</sup> as well.

Insecurity —————→ to endanger<sup>13</sup>



Who endangers? Who does become endangered?

The event again can be described as a state which is prevalent in Armenia. The causer argument comes to be the time parameter and in shadow argument people are enclosed to be endangered despite the fact of being not mentioned in the utterance's syntactical structure. It participates in the logical expression and has its conceptual reference only in discourse makers' mind.

Coming to presidential statements, it is worthwhile to take into consideration those characteristics of American political discourse which indicate the nation's togetherness. The use of the pronouns *we*, *us*, *our* creates the impression that the president and the audience are in the same team and share the same beliefs. In the same way the nominal phrase *the United States* is used for the same purpose and from the political discourse point of view these factors make the speech more reliable and responsible. *The United States responded to the victims of the crime against humanity by leading international diplomatic and private relief efforts* (Bush, George H.W. (1989-93) Armenian Remembrance Day, April 20, 1990) *Today we remember a great tragedy of the twentieth century: the deportations and massacres of roughly one and a half million Armenians in the final years of the Ottoman Empire* (Statement by the President Clinton, April 24, 2000) *On this day of remembrance, we honor the memory of the victims of one of the greatest tragedies of the 20th century, the mass killings and forced exile of as many as 1.5 million Armenians at the end of the Ottoman Empire.* (Bush, George W. (2001-2009) Presidential Message: Armenian Remembrance Day - April 24, 2008) *Ninety four years ago, one of the great atrocities of the 20th century began. Each year, we pause to remember the 1.5 million Armenians who were subsequently massacred or marched to their death in the final days of the Ottoman Empire.* (Statement of President Barak Obama on Armenian Remembrance Day - April 24, 2009) In discourse production speakers generally start from their personal mental model of an event or situation. The model organizes the subjective beliefs of the speaker about such situation [Dijk, 1997:211]. Nearly all presidents start from their personal event model which comprises their subjective attitudes to those terrible events, their sorrow and nation's togetherness. American nation is terrified, shocked by the events of 1915 which resulted in 1.5 million victims. Once such models of events are constructed, speakers use a number of linguistic strategies to reach discourse productivity. According to the presidential statements there had been massacres, 1,5 million Armenians were massacred, killed and murdered in the final years of the Ottoman Empire. Sometimes they turn the events to be taken place in Ottoman Empire (*On this solemn day, I join Armenians from around the world in remembering the victims of the*

<sup>12</sup> Parameters which are semantically incorporated into the lexical item. They are not necessarily expressed in syntax. **James Pustejovsky** "The Generative Lexicon" Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2000, pp. 65-66.

<sup>13</sup> New Webster's dictionary and Roget's Treasures, New York: 1991.

1915 massacres in the Ottoman Empire. /Bill Clinton, Armenian Remembrance Day, April 22, 1994/), or at the end of the Ottoman Empire (Today, we commemorate an appalling tragedy of the 20th century, the massacre of as many as 1.5 million Armenians through forced exile and murder at the end of the Ottoman Empire / George W. Bush, Armenian Remembrance Day, April 24,2002/).A trivial detail should be taken into consideration: Ottoman Empire doesn't exist nowadays and the use of this phrase partially points out USA's evasive politics on genocide issue. They fail to mention the doer and the carrier of these terrible events and from event-based semantics point of view the adverbial modifier of *place* or *time* take an argument position in CAUSE predicate of the verbs, defining those events. From this angle an event can be characterized as a complex event consisting of outer and inner events. The inner expression undergoes change of state. i.e. in CAUSE predicate argument 1.5 million Armenians BECOME massacred, killed (NOT ALIVE).

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (A.S. Hornby 2005) and Webster's New World Treasures(Charlton G. Liard 1971) word meanings expressing the 1915<sup>th</sup> events are defined as follows:

- **Massacre- to kill** a large number of people, especially in a cruel way.(verb)
  - **Murder – to kill** deliberately and illegally (verb)
    - **Mass killings – to kill in a mass way**
- **Atrocity** – 1.A cruel and violent act, especially in a war, 2. murder = kill

From the above mentioned 1.5 million Armenians appear to be killed in the final years/ at the end of Ottoman Empire. The history gives us a hint that the Armenian genocide, i.e. the atrocities committed against the Armenian people of the Ottoman Empire by the Young Turkish Government, did take place during those years. Actually, there exists an event ( $\exists e$ ) expressed by an existential quantification<sup>14</sup>, the *patient*<sup>15</sup> of that event comes to be Armenian people who undergo change of state and “become not alive”. In CAUSE predicate argument, the adverbial modifier fills the position of agent. Constructions that capture argument structure generalizations, like lexical predicates(CAUSE,BECOME), have roles associated with them; these are termed *argument roles* and correspond roughly to traditional thematic roles such as *agent, patient, instrument, source, theme, location*, etc. At the same time, as they are defined in terms of the semantic requirements of particular constructions, argument roles in this framework are more specific and numerous than traditional thematic roles (Goldberg 1995). Argument roles capture generalizations over individual verbs’ participant roles, i.e. each verb is assumed to be conventionally associated with a certain number of participant roles. Only a subset of those roles, namely the roles which are lexically *profiled*, are obligatorily expressed. Lexical profiling, following the general spirit of Langacker (1987, 1991), is designed to indicate which participant roles are associated with a verb’s meaning. Fillmore (1977) similarly notes

<sup>14</sup> In predicate logic, an **existential quantification** is a type of quantifier, a logical constant which is interpreted as “there exists,” “there is at least one,” or “for some.” It expresses that a propositional function can be satisfied by at least one member of a domain of discourse. In other words, it is the predication of a property or relation to at least one member of the domain. It asserts that a predicate within the scope of an existential quantifier is true of at least one value of a predicate variable. (Saunders Mac Lane, Ieke Moerdijk, (1992) *Sheaves in Geometry and Logic* Springer-Verlag 58)

<sup>15</sup> A participant which the verb characterizes as having something happen to it, and as being affected by what happens to it.

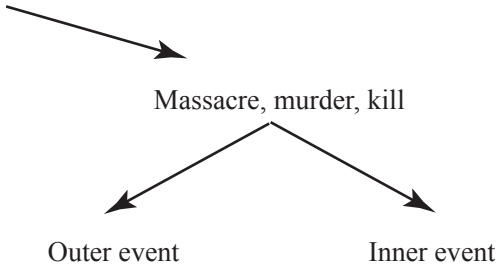


that certain participant roles are obligatorily “brought into perspective” achieving a certain degree of “salience.” Certain types of argument roles are inherently more likely than others to be profiled and therefore obligatorily expressed. For instance, animate roles are generally more salient and central than place or location roles (Clark 1978; Goldberg 1995). However, in American political discourse the place and location roles are more vividly expressed and come to fill the argument position of agent.

So, in the American presidential discourse genocide events are constructed like the below mentioned:

$(\exists e) [Agent(e, x) \& CAUSE(e', s) \& Theme(e', \text{the Armenian people}) \& BECOME(e' s)]$

Complex Events



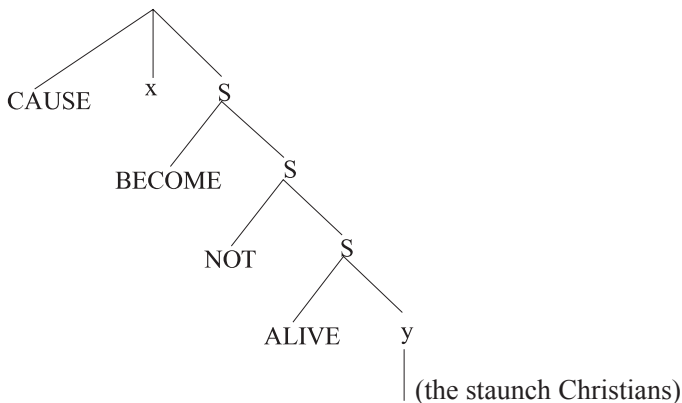
the final years of the Ottoman Emp. 1.5 million Armenian people  
 at the end of the Ottoman Emp.  
 in the Ottoman Emp.

the warning days of Ottoman Empire (Barack Obama April 24, 2012)

The 31<sup>st</sup> president Herbert Hoover, however, in his memoirs once mentioned those *who realized* such terrible events, i.e. from the semantic event point of view the causer argument is represented in his speech and from this angle the complex event comprises a causer agent and the inner expression which undergoes a change of state. («*The association of Mount Ararat and Noah, the staunch Christians who were massacred periodically by the Mohammedan Turks...*»/ The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover, 1952 /)

*There exists an event, where the Mohammedan Turks massacred the staunch Christians.*

$(\exists e) [Agent(e, \text{Mohammedan Turks}) \& CAUSE(e' Theme(\text{the staunch Christian}) \& BECOME(e' s) \text{massacred (NOT ALIVE)})]$

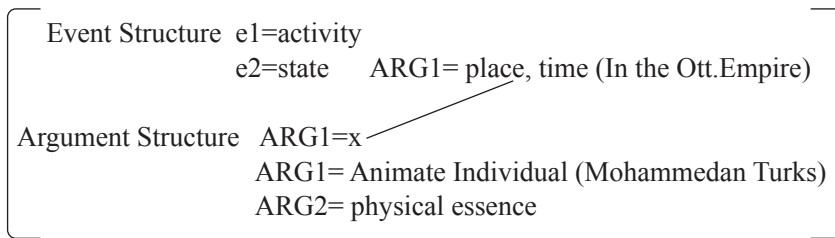


One important point should also be taken into consideration on this issue; the USA's president Barack Obama calls the worst atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as Meds Yeghern<sup>16</sup>, i.e. the massacres of 1.5 million Armenians. ( *Today, we commemorate the Meds Yeghern, one of the worst atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In doing so we honor the memory of the 1.5 million Armenians who were brutally massacred or marched to their death in the warning days of the Ottoman Empire.* / Statement by the president on Armenian Remembrance Day, April 24, 2012/)

The Meds Yeghern is also considered to be an event, which comprises **massacres** and **killings** of 1.5 million Armenians. In its CAUSE predicate argument, the adverbial construction comes to be used as an agentive and involves a change of state in its inner expression ( Armenians BECOME massacred and NOT ALIVE).

The whole essence of the event semantic analyses of American political discourse is enclosed in the below mentioned figure;

**To massacre, murder, kill**



To sum, it is worthy to say that genocide events find their representations in American political discourse in many different ways and event-based semantics gives the opportunity to interpret these events from political discourse point of view. First, it becomes clear that the syntactic realization of a verb argument is constrained by the role that the argument plays in the meaning of the verb. In contemporary theories of argument realization, thematic roles are seen as emergent construct defined by the semantic structures they are embedded. According to this, verb can be decomposed into primitive lexical predicates (CAUSE,BECOME) which give the opportunity to interpret the whole event represented by that verb. The thematic role agent is defined as an argument of predicate CAUSE and a patient is an argument of BECOME. On the other hand, from the viewpoint of context grammar, adverbial modifiers of place and time come to be used by thematic roles. From this aspect, in American political discourse, the adverbial modifier is mostly used in an agentive role and the time/place argument causes change of state in the inner expression of the event. Sometimes in complex event the outer event is missing while state is presented which is a fact by hook or by crook. Finally, from logical point of view, it can be stated that though American politicians construct mental models about those terrible events in their discourse, but fail to recognize the fact without mentioning who realized those activities indeed. Moreover, they use the name *Ottoman Empire*, which does not exist nowadays, i.e. they realize and recognize the events taken place in the historical years of the Ottoman

<sup>16</sup> **Եղեռն (Yeghern)** – ոճիր, չարիք, սպանություն, կոտորած (Massacre, killing): Է. Բ.Աղայան, *Արդի հայերենի բացատրական բառարան (E.B Aghayan, 'The explanatory Dictionary of contemporary Armenian language')* 1976, p. 323.



Empire. In the American political discourse the terrible events of 1915 are mainly described by the underlined verbs in the above mentioned analyses and these very verbs reveal the hidden meanings of the utterance by lexical decomposition of predicate. Thus, the main contribution of event semantics on discourse analyses is to make the meaning of the sentences more explicit. It uses logical parameters, but it makes much more sense than the pure logical language and from American discourse point of view it reveals all hidden political implications concerning the events of 1915 as well as their evasive policy.

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[http://www.anca.org/genocide\\_resource/index.php](http://www.anca.org/genocide_resource/index.php) 27.01.2014

<http://www.armenian-genocide.org/> 27.01.2014

## Ամերիկյան քաղաքական խոսույթում ներկայացված Հայոց ցեղասպանության իմաստաբանական վերլուծություն

Սոնա Հակոբյան

### Ամփոփում

Այսօր քաղաքական խոսույթի ուսումնասիրությունը լեզվաբանական և քաղաքագիտական հետազոտությունների առանցքային մասն է կազմում: Քաղաքական խոսույթի ուսումնասիրությամբ և վերլուծությամբ բացահայտվում է քաղաքական ուղերձի կամ դիրքորոշման եղելությունը: Ավելին՝ լեզվաբանական ուսումնասիրություններում այսօր կիրառվում է «իրադարձությունների իմաստաբանության» նոր տեսությունը, որն ուղիներ է բացում այս ուսումնասիրությունների համապարփակ ներկայացման համար: Հոդվածում «իրադարձությունների իմաստաբանություն» հիմքով վերլուծվում են ԱՄՆ քաղաքական խոսույթում Հայոց ցեղասպանության և թեմային առնչվող իրադարձությունները: Իրադարձությունների լեզվական մեկնաբանությունն իրականանում է տրամաբանական, իմաստաբանական և շարահյուսական մեխանիզմների համատեղմամբ՝ բացահայտելով խոսույթում ներկայացված իրադարձության խորքային իմաստը և պատճառահետևանքային կապերը:

**Բանալի բառեր՝** իրադարձությունների իմաստաբանություն, իրադարձություն, իրավիճակ, պրեդիկատ, փոփոխական, արգումենտ, խոսույթ, իրավիճակային քերականություն, քաղաքական խոսույթ, Հայոց ցեղասպանություն, ԱՄՆ:

## **The Semantic Analyses of Armenian Genocide in the American Political Discourse**

*Sona Hakobyan*

### **Summary**

The study of political discourse is now considered to be one of the main parts of linguistic and political studies. The research leads to the revealing of the political talks' or statements' basic essence. Moreover, within the framework of linguistic studies nowadays a new theory under the name of "Event - based semantics" is used and this new theory opens essential study ways for this kind of research. The events of Armenian Genocide presented in American political discourse are analyzed and represented in the following article. The linguistic representation of events is realized by combining logical, semantic and syntactical mechanisms which give us a hint to reveal the events' deep meaning and causal relations presented in discourse.

**Keywords:** Event-semantics, event, state, predicate, variable, argument, discourse, context grammar, political discourse, Armenian Genocide, USA.

## **Семантический анализ Геноцида армян в американском политическом дискурсе**

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### **Резюме**

Сегодня изучение политического дискурса является ключевой частью политических и лингвистических исследований. Исследования ведут к тому, что благодаря рассмотрению и анализу политического дискурса выявляется вся суть речи или политической позиции. Более того, в рамках изучения лингвистики употребляется новая теория под названием «семантика событий», благодаря которой выявляются комплексные методы этого же исследования. В данной статье на основе семантических событий подвергается анализу геноцид 1915 года, представленный в американском политическом дискурсе. Совмещение логических, семантических и синтаксических механизмов, выявляющих глубокий смысл и причинно-следственные связи в дискурсе, реализуется лингвистическим толкованием событий.

**Ключевые слова:** Семантика событий, событие, ситуация, предикат, переменная, аргумент, дискурс, ситуационная грамматика, политический дискурс, Геноцид армян, США.