Technocracy as a Cultural Concept in American Discourse: Cultural Linguistic Insight

Svitlana Lyubymova
Odessa National Polytechnic University, Ukraine. Email: elurus2006@gmail.com

Abstract
At the time of geopolitical tension and deepening of financial crisis, the idea of a technocratic government is urgent across the geographic spectrum. Appeared in the USA at the beginning of the 20[th]century the concept of technocracy comprises various information of technical elite and its ideology. The paper aims to explore cultural meaning of the concept in American culture. Based on the premise that cultural meaning of a concept manifests in the language, this paper focuses on discourse representation of the concept. The research includes a brief historic outline of the term "technocracy" and a corpus-based analysis of cultural associations and public opinion of the concept. A cultural value of technocracy is associated with a new aesthetic that evokes mainly hostile attitude and criticism in American society as inhuman doctrine. Prevailing negative implications show that American society rejects technocracy as progressive and reformative power in the country.

Keywords: concept, categorization, cultural linguistics, technocracy, cultural value, connotation.

> Scientism is their religion... progress their god.
> – Michael Shermer, *How We Believe*, p.61

Introduction

Inalienable characteristic of Science in the 21[th]century is its multidisciplinarity; thus, it is rather hard to draw the demarcation line between objects of interest, methods and approaches of many scientific disciplines. Since a natural language is announced the means to discover cognitive and cultural phenomena (Everett, Hjelmslev, Vygotsky, Wierzbicka, etc.), it has become the cross-point of major branches of humanities, cultural linguistics among them. This relatively new scientific paradigm refers to study of conceptualization processes as well as cultural concepts and stereotypes that are conditioned by cultural values of a definite society. Cultural concepts are cognitive phenomena that store and transfer by means of a national language prevalent components of a national culture.

Being a dominant aspect of our life, culture determines everything: our interests, thoughts, our speech, models of behavior; historical sense and scientific training, the values we appreciate, the quality of life we admire (Lippman, 1982). Even purely political, as it may seem to be, concepts are also largely determined by culture:

"Culture enters into political life as a very powerful condition. It is the way of creating ourselves... The culture of today is for the future a historical condition. That is its political importance. The mental habits we are forming, our philosophies and magazines, theatres, debates, schools, pulpits, and newspapers become part of an active past..." (Lippman, 1982, 386).

Cultural concepts concentrate useful for the society information that is transmitted by community members by means of language.

The 20th century has given to the human civilization very many scientific discoveries, new ideas and theories, which are still being argued. Our work is devoted to one of such disputable ideas – the concept of technocracy and its cultural characteristics in American society.

Concept as the result of categorization and conceptualization

The term "concept" belongs to the notional system of cognitive, semantic, and cultural linguistics (Croft & Alan, 2004). Concept is determined as an object from the "ideal" world, which reflects people's cultural understanding of the real world, and has the name (Wierzbicka, 1980). A name, that designates a concept, fulfils the function of a cultural sign. Mental character of a concept reflects in a set of images, judgments and typical scenarios of a national culture.

Being a mental representation of a class or individual that "deals with what is being represented and how that information is typically used during the categorization" (Smith, 1989, 502), concepts represent social categories appearing as the results of categorization that lies in the sphere of social perception:

"In order to form an impression of others, we interpret their behavior in terms of the trait categories it exemplifies. Then, based on the cluster of traits that we have inferred we may categorize social targets into broader types. This bottom-up pathway to social impressions is complemented by a top-down pathway in which perceptually given characteristics (e.g., sex, race, and so on) serve as the basis for category identification, leading to the derivation of trait inferences and behavioral expectations based on stored generic about the category" (Bodenhausen, Todd, Becker 2007, 123).

A concept, representing category, stores and transmits information of a group, characterized by certain anthropological traits, which are emotionally perceived by a social community. The perception is conditioned and directed by a national culture.

Human mind works "with the aid of categories. . . Orderly living depends on it" (Allport, 1954, p. 20). Any cultural and social category is formed by schematic thinking, which is information processing, guided and shaped by people's generic beliefs about the social world. These beliefs are represented by concepts in the national conceptual system (Bartlett, 1932).

Cultural concepts, categories, schemas are results of conceptualization process. In the broad definition, conceptualization is a representation of mental experience preceded by perceptual experience. In the process of conceptualization, some facets of cultural and social phenomenon are rendered more salient than others (Langacker, 2000). The prominence of some features depends on their cultural value in a certain society.

People, that conceptualize experience in a similar fashion, constitute a cultural group. The way in which a cultural group conceptualizes experience is constantly interacted and conventionalized by the members of the group. Concepts, schemas and categories are objects of

interaction between the members of the group (Sharifian, 2011). The means of communicative interaction is language. It does not only deliver meaning of conceptualized information but also participate in conceptualization process:

> "Language is a dynamic adaptive system in the sense that it can be adapted to meet the communicative needs of its speakers. ...speakers often adapt their language in specific situations to express certain specific meanings...certain features of human languages may be adapted to express a wide range of new conceptualizations" (Sharifian, 2011, 34).

The study of concepts from cultural linguistic perspective involves culture perceptual pattern analysis of a group or individual. Meaning of a concept can be delineated by two major components: a linguistic meaning and cultural sense, which becomes evident in the conceptual value component. In this view, engaged in representation of a social reality language means are explored to outline a cultural value of a concept.

The methodology of our study is based on theoretical assumption that the concept cultural value and pragmatic potential may be revealed and described by linguistics methods of research. The language corpus and internet discourse analysis with application of contextual, distributive, semantic and content analysis techniques have been applied in this work to describe the concept of technocracy represented in American culture.

Sometimes concepts, which appeared in a certain culture, are disseminated globally. In this case, the implanted concepts lose specificity of the culture they appeared, and become universal. Such is the case of the concept "technocracy": appeared in the USA, this concept has spread all over the world. The reason of this is the globalization processes in all spheres of human activities. In different countries of the world, we witness the growing power of technocracy. Leading scientists and engineers gain ascendancy and wealth. They take up executive posts and participate in administering their countries. The attitude toward technocracy is quite different: in low-income countries, technocratic politicians are less criticized and blamed for undemocratic reforms, than in highly developed countries, such as the USA.

The concept of technocracy: a glimpse into the history of the term

Technocracy, in our opinion, is a cultural concept represented in American discourse that comprises various information about a political, economic and administrative form of government, people who provide that government, artefacts of technologic progress, judgements and estimations of the technocracy phenomenon in American society. The concept is of interest in its historic aspect as well as modern state of it.

Admitting the fact that "technocracy" is a cultural concept represented in American discourse, we state its cultural meaning, which is realized through associations, emotive evaluation and pragmatic sense.

The notional information, constituting the core of the concept, is found in the dictionaries and encyclopedias that define the word "technocracy" as a group of scientists, a social system, or a theory of society according to which government is controlled by scientific experts (Collins Cobuild, Webster's, Longman Dictionary). Correspondingly, "technocrat" is an adherent of technocracy or one of the group of scientists, engineers, and other experts who have political power as well as technical knowledge. It is evident that the semantic meaning of the related words is based on two major components: science and power.

Rapid progress in technology at the beginning of the 20th century makes people think about growing power of science and the role of scientists in this process. Coined in 1919 by a Californian engineer, William H. Smyth, the word "technocracy" was to describe an effective rule that can be assured by scientists and engineers. The designation of any phenomenon of a real or ideal world means establishing a connection of language elements with a phenomenon thus assigning the word to the idea of this phenomenon. The word "technocracy" turned out an apt term easily translated into different languages, as the concept itself has become well known beyond the bounds of English-speaking world. The analogy between the words with the lexical component originated from Greek *-kratia* (power, rule), such as aristocracy, democracy, autocracy, shows the power and influence of people connected with technological progress and their abilities to govern the country.

Existing in the English language almost a century, the word "technocracy" developed word-forming paradigm consisting of "technocrat", "technocratic", "technocratization". This is characterized by a strong meaning correlation based on common semantic components: power and expertise.

Technocracy as a social group represents the elite of technical experts, who have been educated and trained to perform difficult tasks and solve urgent problems. Progressive in the sense of their purpose to optimize welfare by means of scientific development the ideas of technocrats seem quite radical to many people. A noble goal of science to prolong human life and improve the quality of it cannot be understood negatively. However, the idea of a scientific government in the USA seems controversial and disruptive for democratic values. To interpret a negative pragmatic potential of this concept, we need to consider social and cultural conditions of its appearance in American society.

Originated from progressive ideas of engineers and economists of the early twentieth century the technocratic movement in the USA established on writings of Henry Gantt, Thorstein Veblen, and Howard Scott. The first American adherents of technocracy suggested that executives were incapable of reforming their industries in the public interest that is why the control over industries should be given to engineers. The official symbol of the technocracy movement has become a Monad, an indivisible and hence ultimately simple entity that signifies a balance between consumption and production, as it is the fundamental principle of a capitalist world.

In the book "Technocracy and the American dream: The Technocrat Movement, 1900-1941" William E. Akin describes all stages of technocracy movement: formation, peak and decay of its popularity.

According to Akin, the movement emerged, at the beginning of the previous century, when progressive intellectuals (a newly emerging professional middle-class) felt optimistic about possibility to overcome poverty, injustice, corruption, superstition and class conflict by means of centralized planning and administration under the guidance of experts. These measures were to assure realization of the American dream. The technocratic movement developed its own ideology on the basis of progressivism and managerialism – ideologies aimed to support social progress and reform. The conception of progressivism lies in the belief that economic and social problems, as poverty, class and race collisions, can be eliminated by temperance, education and labor reform. Managerialists believe in the social progress that is delivered by organizations and companies rather than individuals. This kind of collective force is opposed to individual decision-making powers. Developed during decades ideology of scientific management acquired social implication that only engineers of technological world were suited to accomplish progressive goal of uplift and establish more progressive social order (Akin, 1977).

The technocratic movement flourished in America in the 1930s. The country, which scientific and industrial potential, though lessened by economic crisis that rushed into the USA in 1929, was still unsurpassed by any other country in the world. At that time, the official reporter of the movement activities was the New York Times.

The lack of political theory of action, the substitution of social reforms by scientific decisions, and the inability to understand the active role of people in social life brought, as Akin considers, the decline of power of technocrats in the USA. The idea of political democracy remained a stronger ideal than technological elitism. Socially desirable goals, that technology made possible, could be achieved without the sacrifice of existing values and without the apocalypse, that technocracy predicted (Akin, 1977).

Despite foretold in the 1940s death of technocratic movement it is still alive and agitates society by new ideas. Nowadays technocracy is related to transhumanism – the ideology that aims to enhance physical and mental abilities of human race, or even make people immortal, by means of science and technology (Hernaes, 2016). This idea seem for religious people blasphemous, while skeptics consider it absurd. Nevertheless, a possible improvement of human race appeals to many people.

At the time of geopolitical tension and deepening of financial crisis, the ideas of technocracy regain their popularity. In his book "Technocracy in America: Rise of the Info-State" Parag Khanna takes the position that America needs more technocracy than democracy: the goal is effective governance and improvement of national well-being. Nowadays Americans trust less their governmental institutions. According to the World Values Survey, cited by Khanna, the number of people in America, who believe that experts should decide what is the best for the country, rather than the government, has risen from 32% to 49% (Khanna, 2017).

Technocracy: Discourse representation

Language, as the tool and the product of culture, reveals moral and ethical norms, goals and attitudes of people to a certain social event. Wierzbicka wisely notes:

> "The meaning of a word constitutes an important social fact. It reflects the dominant outlook of a society and, to some extent, perpetuates that outlook" (Wierzbicka, 1997, 126).

The meaning of a cultural concept is largely found in produced and distributed by the language community implications that are realized in a text or group of texts, which, with a social context of their existence, constitute the discourse.

The concept of technocracy is represented mainly in a political and social discourse. M. Bakhtin named these kinds of discourse ideological thus emphasizing their social orientation. The prominent scholar considers "the diverse world" of social and political discourse a complex, highly developed and organized cultural communication:

> "During the process of their formation, they absorb and digest various primary genres that have taken form in unmediated speech communication" (Bakhtin, 1986, 62).

That means political and social discourses reflect judgments and attitudes circulating in the society.

Being a component of culture, politics manifests values and ideals that denote for the majority of Americans liberty, equality, democracy and individualism. Any effort to vary or modify

these values is met with indignation and condemnation. In American society, technocracy is perceived as a new aristocracy:

> "Like aristocracies past, it has its own rituals and symbols and practices, and it conceives of itself as uncynically serving the best interests of mankind" (Giridharadas, 2011).

Superiority in a democratic country evokes hostile attitude and criticism, though technocrats get leading positions in the society owing to achievements in science and technology that ensure welfare to the nation.

More profound insight into the character of technocracy requires empirical study of American discourse, which has been conducted on Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davis, 2015) and The Time Magazine Corpus created by Mark Davies (Davis, 2006). The corpus-based research can discover implicit features of the object under study overlooking individual perception of it. Empiric research assists in studying phenomena which frequency of occurrence in speech, as in the case of technocracy, is insignificant (Talmy, 2007). Corpus analysis gives relevant suggestions of connotational meaning of "technocracy" in American society.

Analyzed corpora texts comprise the period of 1932-2015, the period of formation of the concept till its present state. As ascertained in the course of analysis, the concept of technocracy has been perceived critically throughout the whole period of its existence in American culture. However, for some people the figure of a technocrat gets an appeal as a modern hero who has found rational solutions for precise problems through a process of practical experimentation.

The generalized portrait of a technocrat presents a male person of asexual look. Despite a common opinion that American women take up executive positions in any sphere of social life, they are rarely noticed in a scientific elite of the country. This can be explained by several reasons: a masculocentric reality of our life, as well as cognitive distinctions of sexes, that were empirically proved. Men show higher ability in mathematical reasoning and analyzing, while women are better in verbal reasoning (Langdon & Seaborg, 1999). Anyhow, few notorious names of women, that advanced technology and made scientific discoveries, are known in the world history. The associative experiment conducted by us in the Polytechnic University of Ukraine showed that the students of computer science associate an American technocrat with a male person.

In outward appearance, a technocrat is undistinguished. This person wears casual clothes that do not look elegant or well fit on him. He does not want to attract attention of others: the chunky glasses distract from his face.

People do not know him personally, but hear of him frequently, expressing his ideas, his projects, his plans, his directives. He is accused of superiority while seeking ways to remake the image of humanity. The technocrat is considered to be essentially deceitful since he represents, as it is believed, foremost his own concerns. Described as American Faust who sold his soul to a demon of technocracy, he is thought as deprived of moral questions, sacrificing spiritual values for power and material gain.

Corpora analysis shows technocracy as American phenomenon disseminated all over the world, the main features of which are awesome competence and ambition to overcome global problems. Its holistic approach to the lives of individuals contradicts traditional American belief in individualism – the value of independence and self-reliance. Contradictory to the value of equality as it seems for Americans is the solution of economic problems by application of scientific patterns to public affairs instead of maintaining more balanced levels of production and a better distribution of wealth. Though rational as it may seem, concentration of power in the

country clashes against the value of equality that protects the worker against tyranny and gives the citizens the possibility of participating in the management of their own destiny. A noble aim of technocracy to overcome poverty is seen as the intention to maximize profits without proper concern for the environment. Conceiving technocratic plans as compromise and moderation of political values, Americans reject technocracy as progressive and reformative power in the country. Technocracy contrasts with humanism: the aim is the same – the greater good of humanity, but means to achieve the aim is different.

A connotative meaning of the word "technocracy" manifests in metaphoric representations of the concept in the analyzed discourse. Described as disease, technocracy is shown as a kind of deviance from the normal state of a robust society organization. Connotation reflects emotive and evaluative attitude toward the object of denotation. As the disease should be cured and overcome, the technocracy in the country is to be curbed. This opinion, though individual, reflects public estimation of the concept. An individual's notion of some phenomena develops through communicative interaction and includes an assessment of its degree of conventionality in the speech community (Langacker, 2008).

Associating technocracy with feudalism shows it as primitive and inhuman social system, in which a new nobility holds absolute power and controls citizens as vassals obliged to live according the laws of governors.

A view on technocracy as American fad, a style of today and a vogue shows the phenomenon of a little value and importance that does not deserve serious consideration. Transient and insignificant as it seems to be, technocracy has been provoking debates, arousing interest and fears already almost a century.

The cultural value of technocracy is stated in associating it with a new aesthetic in the society. The ambiguous meaning of this can be interpreted in two ways:

1) technocracy is a set of principles of the movement underlying the power of a humankind to make human life free from ugliness of poverty and hunger, thus making life beautiful;

2) ironic estimation of the concept, showing technocracy as the subculture striving for popularity in the country and participation in politics.

A much-criticized technocracy has become more than just a set of strategies for the efficient pursuit of progress, but a doctrine, showing that political power in the country is weak and unable to ensure national wellbeing. A hope for a better tomorrow generates faith of the disillusioned with politics of the government. These people believe that technocracy would succeed where politics has failed.

The study of 140 collocations presented in The Time Magazine Corpus until the year of 2005 shows that in most cases collocations reflect conventional evaluative meaning of the concept.

Table 1. Sample of collocations with words "technocracy/technocrat" in The Time Magazine Corpus

Adjective + Noun	Year of Usage
visionless technocrat	1932

triumphant technocracy	1933
much-criticized technocracy	1933
a Fascist technocracy	1933
radical and mechanistic technocracy	1933
self-styled Technocrat	1938
the Depression-born technocracy	1951
efficient, inventive technocrat	1967
abrasive and distant technocrat	1970
pragmatic technocrat	1971
a quiet, efficient technocrat	1973
impersonal technocracy	1973
apolitical technocrat	1974
a thespian technocrat devoid of true passion	1975
respected technocrat	1976
up-and-coming technocrat	1977
inflexible technocracy	1977
a deliberate, unassuming technocrat	1978
reformist technocrat	1981
Harvard-educated technocrat	1982
a modern, Western-style technocrat	1985
a cold, aloof technocrat	1986
a nonideological technocrat	1987
a soulless technocrat	1988
a colorless technocrat	1989
bulky technocrat	1991
a reform-minded technocrat	1991
crushing human freedom technocracy	1995
a Westernizing technocrat	1996
polished technocrat	1999
a bow tie-wearing technocrat	2000
bloodless technocrat	2003
well-regarded technocrat	2003
tough, courteous and humane technocrat	2005

As seen from the table, the major part of collocations reflects negative perception of technocracy or technocrats. Technocracy is described as inflexible, distant and impersonal fabric of society. Throughout the analyzed period, negative assessments prevail.

Though it is impossible to get an objectively accurate idea of how commonly a word is used in the society, for the results of word frequency will always be affected by the size of the corpus and the choice of the texts entered in it (Wierzbicka, 1997), we can say that the usage of word "technocracy" has been growing during the five years' period. Correspondingly, the concept value in American culture is growing.

Table 2. The frequency of occurrence of the word "technocracy" in Corpus of Contemporary American English

Total 832	
1990-1994	104
1995-1999	128
2000-2004	32
2005-2009	24
2010-2015	128

As we see, there is a decrease in frequency of occurrence of the word "technocracy" in 2000-2009. In our opinion, it can be explained by terrorism concerns that overwhelmed American society in these years. It is the period of presidency of George W. Bush and the US forces military action in Iraq.

Nowadays, political experts mark the politics of the newly elected D. Trump, as well as former B. Obama, as technocratic. Therefore, frequency of the concept "technocracy" in the media discourse, to our mind, will increase in future.

Conclusion

Analyzing cultural nature of the concept "technocracy" on the language data we have come to the conclusion that this concept is represented in American cultural system as belonging of a political sphere. The cultural meaning of the concept is realized in a political and social discourse through associations, emotive evaluation and pragmatic sense. As an artefact of American culture, it has been spread all over the world denoting specific kind of state government. The concept is marked by negative implications in American society, where the ideas of rational but limited citizen participation in state affairs are not popular, thus it arouses criticism and denunciation. Appearing with the advancement of techno-consumer society, technocracy remains a powerful movement nowadays. Further research of the concept "technocracy" can be directed to revealing peculiarities of it in national cultures of other countries.

References

Akin, W. E. (1977).Technocracy and the American dream: The Technocrat Movement, 1900- 1941. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Allport, G. W. (1954). The nature of prejudice. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
Bakhtin, M.M. (1986). Speech Genres and Other Late Essays. University of Texas Press.
Bartlett, F. C. (1932). Remembering. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Bloom, H. (2000). The Global Brain: The Evolution of Mass Mind from the Big Bang to the 21st Century. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Bodenhausen, G. V., Todd, A. R., Becker A. P. (2007). Categorization the Social World: Affect, Motivation, and Self-Regulation. *Psychology* of *Learning and Motivation, 47*. Academic Press, 123-155.

Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary. (1988). J. Sinclair (Ed.) . Harper Collins Publishers.

Croft, W., Alan, D. (2004). Cognitive Linguistics. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Davies, M. (2015). Corpus of Contemporary American English. Retrieved from http://corpus.byu.edu/coca.

Davies, M. (2006). Time Magazine Corpus. Retrieved from http://corpus.byu.edu/time.

Giridharadas, A. Reality Crashes the Technocrats' Party. Retrieved March 25, 2011, from http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/26/us/26iht-currents26.html.

Gries, S. Th., Divjak, D. (2008). Behavioral Profiles. A Corpus-based Approach to Cognitive Semantic Analysis. (Eds.) Evans V., Pourcel S. *Cognitive Linguistics.* Amsterdam-Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 57-75.

Hernaes, C.O. The Ethics of Transhumanism and the Return of Eugenics. Retrieved September 8, 2016, from https://www.technocracy.news/index.php/2016/09/08/the-ethics-of-transhumanism-and-the-return-of-eugenics/.

Khanna, P. (2017). Technocracy in America: Rise of the Info-State. CreateSpace.

Langacker, R.W. (2000). Grammar and Conceptualization. Berlin-New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Langacker, R. W. (2008). Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction. New York: Oxford University Press.

Langdon, K., Seaborg D. Sex Differences in the Distribution of Mental Ability. *Noesis*, 144. Retrieved November, 1999, from http://www.polymath-systems.com.

Lippmann, W. (1982). The Essential Lippmann: A Political Philosophy for Liberal Democracy. (Eds.) C. Rossiter, J. Lare. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. (1995). International Students Edition. Pearson Education Limited.

Sharifian, F. (2011). Cultural Conceptualisations and Language: Theoretical Framework and Applications. Amsterdam - Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Smith, E. E. (1989). Concepts and induction. (Ed.) Posner M. I. *Foundations of Cognitive Science.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 501-526.

Talmy, L. (2007). Foreword. (Eds.) M. Gonzalez-Marquez, I. Mittelberg. *Methods in Cognitive Linguistics*. Amsterdam - Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

*Webster's New World College Dictionary. (*1999). 4th Ed. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Wierzbicka, A. (1980). The Case for Surface Case. Ann Arbor: Karoma.

Wierzbicka, A. (1997). Understanding Cultures through Their Key Words. New York - Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Svitlana Lyubymova is PhD (German Languages), Associate Professor of Foreign Languages Department, National Polytechnic University, Odessa, Ukraine. She is the author of the monograph on cultural and cognitive aspects of American sociocultural stereotype "Flapper" (Lambert Academic Publishing, Germany), and academic articles on language representation of cultural stereotypes and concepts (published in Ukraine, Russia, and the USA).