

I. ROZPRAWY I ANALIZY

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Irena Snukiškienė

Vilnius University, the Institute of Foreign Languages, Lithuania

ORCID: 0000-0003-0228-9955

e-mail: irena.snukiskiene@ff.vu.lt

The conceptualisation of lie in contemporary English texts

Pojęcie kłamstwa we współczesnych tekstach angielskich

Abstract: The study aims to reconstruct the linguistic-cultural image of the cultural concept of LIE entrenched in contemporary English texts. The research is conducted within the S-Q-T methodology proposed by the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin. The analysis was carried out by distinguishing semantic aspects of the concept of LIE in textual data, interpreting them, and grouping them into semantic profiles. The data consist of the contexts selected from the British National Corpus (BNC), the media corpus News on the Web (NOW), and independently selected texts retrieved from the press and the Internet. The research shows that LIE in contemporary English texts is primarily seen from the political perspective where it is closely associated with post-truth. The texts also reveal numerous profiles of LIE and its ambiguous axiological assessment. Although in general it is considered unethical, morally unacceptable and axiologically negative, lying is also seen as a necessary element of social life and an integral aspect of politics.

Key words: LIE; linguistic worldview; conceptualisation; textual data

Introduction

With the world sinking into the post-truth era, the values of truth and lie have become central to philosophical, axiological and political debates. The emerging new forms of the phenomenon of lie, such as propaganda, manipulation, Big Lie, fake news, etc. influence and shape people's opinions and attitudes, and the boundary between the true and the false becomes

blurred. In this context, the importance of the analysis of the cultural concept of LIE becomes obvious. Lie, as a phenomenon, has been examined from many perspectives: psychological, philosophical, logical, or theological. This article follows a different, linguistic approach, with ethnolinguistic analysis applied as a method. The article aims to reconstruct the concept of LIE entrenched in contemporary English texts. The linguistic analysis of the lexical item *lie* seems to be meaningful and revealing, since language is the main and most prevalent tool of deception, allowing *homo loquens* (the talking man) to easily become *homo mendax* (the lying man).

Research Design

This study belongs to the field of ethnolinguistics, which places a particular interest in restoring the linguistic worldview (LWV), which is defined by the founder of the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin, Jerzy Bartmiński, as “the interpretation of reality encoded in a given language, which can be captured in the form of judgements about the world” (Bartmiński 2012 [2009]: 76). Such a cognitively-oriented analysis treats language as a tool of cognition and interpretation of the world. Linguistic knowledge is regarded as a part of the knowledge of the world, and the latter is contained in linguistic knowledge. LWV is restored through an analysis of concepts¹ and the construction of the cognitive definition,² which has the form of a narrative about a certain part of reality (Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2018: 14–15). Ethnolinguistic research on concepts is carried out by distinguishing their semantic aspects,³ viewed from interpretational perspectives,⁴ and

¹ *Concept* is one of the main terms in ethnolinguistics, defined as “a convenient capsule of thought that embraces thousands of distinct experiences and that is ready to take in thousands more” (Sapir 1921: 12–13). Concepts are subjective, including both collective and personal experience (Gryshkova 2014: 29).

² The *cognitive definition* is a description of certain knowledge about the world, well-established and available through an analysis of language and its use. The model of cognitive definition is based on a subjective reconstruction of the LWV, and aims to describe how an object is perceived by language users (Rutkowska et al. 2017, Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2014).

³ An *aspect* (or *facet*) is a group of features that facilitate an explication of a concept. Aspects are distinguished through the analysis of data rather than imposed from the outside; they form a network that embraces the data, facilitating a comparison of the objects being studied. Aspects reflect the experience of ordinary users of a particular language and representatives of a particular culture. They are sets of features that correspond to some common characteristic, e.g. material, shape, activity, appearance, location, etc. (Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2015: 32).

⁴ The *interpretational perspective* refers to the totality of the properties of the semantic structure of a word (Bartmiński 1990: 112).

grouping them into semantic profiles.⁵

In order to reconstruct the linguistic worldview, the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin developed the S-Q-T methodology, based on the analysis of three types of data: (1) systemic data, obtained from dictionaries of a given language, including the entire lexical semantic network: paradigmatic relations (hypernyms, hyponyms, antonyms, synonyms, derivatives, etc.), syntagmatic relations (collocations, multi-word units, etc.); (2) questionnaires as experimental data to check how contemporary language users understand a given concept and (3) textual data, consisting of (a) stereotyped texts, such as proverbs and sayings, (b) excerpts derived from public discourse, especially from “high-level” journalism, and (c) corpus data, including language corpora and Internet searches (Niebrzegowska-Batmińska 2018: 14–15, Rutkowska et al. 2017: 31–35). This methodology, which attempts to capture the full meaning of a concept through the analysis of all these types of data, requires a discussion much more extensive than is allowed by the framework of this article, therefore this study is limited to the analysis of contemporary texts: excerpts retrieved from public discourse and corpora.

The data were collected from the main English corpora of contemporary texts available at *english-corpora.org*. Most of the contexts were selected from the British National Corpus (BNC), and the main daily updated media corpus News on the Web (NOW). That data were supplemented with independently selected contexts retrieved from the press and the Internet. The research includes texts of various genres: fiction and non-fiction, journalism, scientific and administrative genres, with journalistic articles being the most numerous.

Empirical analysis

Oxford English Dictionary defines *lie* as “a false statement made with intent to deceive” (OED). Dictionaries of contemporary English (CED, LDCO, CD, OALD, MED) define it as “a statement made by somebody knowing that it is not true”. Lexicographic data provide the central, basic meaning of *lie* which roughly corresponds to the definition of a “prototypical lie” proposed by Linda Coleman and Paul Kay: “the speaker (S) asserts some proposition (P) to an addressee (A). The main requirements: P is false; S believes P to be false; in uttering P, S intends to deceive A” (Coleman and Kay 1981: 28).

⁵ A *profile* is understood as a variant of an object’s observation, formed by a selection of facets (aspects) and their arrangement according to the rules of implication. A profile is filled with content according to the accepted knowledge about the world (Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2020: 116).

The Polish linguist Jadwiga Puzynina provides a similar definition of *lie*, representing it with the formula “X lies, therefore, X consciously informs Y that z, while knowing that there is no z”, where X stands for the provider of the false information (the subject of lying), Y stands for its recipient (the object of lying), and z stands for the information provided by X (Puzynina 1992: 190). This definition, as well as the previous one, highlights the semantic aspect of the intentionality of *lie*. The word *informs* is also meaningful here as it indicates that false information may be transmitted both linguistically and extralinguistically.

As observed, neither of the definitions mentioned above includes the moral assessment of the object. This was later taken into account in Anna Wierzbicka’s explicatory model, written in Natural Semantic Metalanguage:

X lied to Y =
 X said something to Y.
 X knew it was not true.
 X said it because it wanted Y to think it was true.
 [people would say: if someone does this, it is bad] (Wierzbicka 1996: 152)

This basic meaning of LIE (with the emphasis on intentionality) can also be observed in contemporary English texts; however, lying there is mostly observed from the political and ideological perspective, and, as such, overlaps with other perspectives: axiological, pragmatic, psychological-social, and existential.

The political lie is normally seen as morally reprehensible; nevertheless, the contexts present it as a common, unavoidable reality. On the other hand, tolerance limits, within which a politician’s lie might be tolerated, are disputable (examples 1–3). English texts reflect the dynamic nature of the political lie, i.e. it can be aimed to change people’s perception of the present, the past, or the future. The past-oriented lie is targeted at altering the interpretation and, in particular, the assessment of history (4). A stereotypical example of such a lie is the Orwellian Ministry of Truth, responsible for the falsification of historical events. The future-oriented lie is metaphorically associated with the strategy of deliberately influencing future events and decisions. This category of lie is presented as particularly dangerous because it is effective even when revealed (5, 6).

- (1) **Politicians have always lied.** Does it matter if they leave the truth behind entirely? (*The Economist*, 2016)
- (2) Dishonesty in politics is nothing new; **but the manner in which some politicians now lie**, and the havoc they may wreak by doing so, **are worrying.** (*The Economist*, 2016)

- (3) **The propaganda campaign** culminated in a violent assault on the Capitol and Mr Trump's second impeachment. At his trial Republicans argued that, **regardless of whether Mr Trump's claims were lies, as long as he did not call for violence he had a constitutional right to make them.** (*The Economist*, 2021)
- (4) After more statues were removed across the United States and Europe, Boris Johnson weighed in, arguing that 'to tear these statues down would be **to lie about our history**'. But **lying about our history** – and particularly about our late-colonial history – **has been a habit of the British state for decades.** (theweek.co.uk, 2020)
- (5) Recent reading of two books has franked my belief that politics is now firmly in the era when the **Big Lie is not a gaffe or even a piece of verbal mischief but a strategy.** It is depressing, demoralising. (thenational.scot, 2016)
- (6) The **strategic lie** is designed with just one thought in mind – to make an impact. **This is achieved not just by the lie itself but also, paradoxically, by its rebuttal.** (independent.co.uk, 2020)

The political lie is often associated with the phenomenon of post-truth (7), which intrinsically involves a blurred boundary between falsehood and truth when even scientifically proven facts become controversial (8). Selected texts present a great variety of post-truth elements, such as propaganda (3), Big Lie (5, 7), flim-flam (9), bullshit (10), or the distortion of facts and statistics (16, 17). They also mention different post-truth strategies, e.g. an attempt to blend part of the truth with a lie (11, 12) – the strategy known as the “truth sandwich” (a term proposed in 2018 by the U.S. linguist George Lakoff in a Twitter post⁶) (13), or the persistent repetition of a lie, a strategy often employed by totalitarian regimes (14). Texts also conceptualise lies as flexible objects of manipulation and reveal their instrumental function (15–17). A lie is also metaphorically presented as a commercial product or a service (18, 19).

- (7) The reality of modern politics is that the Big Lie can win big. [...] **In the age of post-truth, the Big Lie is king.** (thenational.scot, 2016)
- (8) **These are all knowable facts:** Climate change is real. The 2020 U.S. Elections were the most secure in history. Systemic racism exists. Covid-19 is killing people. The earth is round. And yet **each of those demonstrable truths are somehow considered controversial.** (pressgazette.co.uk, 2021)
- (9) Donald Trump's presidency **kicked off with a lie** about the size of the crowd at his inauguration and degenerated into a four-year **extravaganza of flim-flam.** After he lost to Joe Biden, he and his supporters disseminated **the biggest lie** in the history of modern American politics: that he had won the election, only to have it stolen. (*The Economist*, 2021)
- (10) But in Trump's case, it's hard to separate his career as an adulterer (and, of course, an accused serial sexual harasser) from his career as **a world-class public liar and bullshitter.** (vice.com, 2018)

⁶ <https://twitter.com/georgelakoff/status/1068891959882846208?lang=en>

- (11) [...] nothing is more convincing than a **half-truth joined on to a lie**. (Andrew Walker, *Enemy territory: the Christian struggle for the modern world*, 1988)
- (12) **The best way to tell a convincing lie is to wrap it in as much of the truth as you can afford**. (denofgeek.com, 2021)
- (13) Scientists create guide to building **truth ‘sandwich’** to combat Covid misinformation. (independent.co.uk, 2021)
- (14) [...] **the more a lie is repeated**, the more it risks morphing into some sort of reality. (bbc.co.uk, 2016)
- (15) A lie is not simply as good as the truth: it is better, because unlike the truth, **lies are completely malleable** and creatures of their maker. (Mark Almond, *The rise and fall of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu*, 1992)
- (16) Under him Russia has again become a place in which **truth and falsehood are no longer distinct and facts are put into the service of the government**. (*The Economist*, 2014)
- (17) “CROOKS already know these tricks. Honest men must learn them in self-defence,” wrote Darrell Huff in 1954 in “**How to Lie With Statistics**”, a guide to getting figures to say whatever you want them to. (*The Economist*, 2014)
- (18) Uber and Lyft are **selling a lie**. They are lying to the public and lying to their drivers. (theregister.co.uk, 2020).
- (19) In a letter, he claimed he was called “**a liar for hire**” in the documentary. (theguardian.com, 2015)

English texts emphasise the importance of media in combating lies, metaphorised as a particularly powerful tool that can only be controlled by free democratic media (20, 21). Meanwhile, alternative media sources (digital platforms, social networks) are viewed as a particularly convenient matrix for spreading lies. It is in the post-truth space that the boundary between the true and the false becomes blurred, and lies can easily be turned into truth (22, 23). Such texts reflect a moral dilemma about the balance between the freedom of expression and the responsibility of the media (especially social networks) for spreading false information (24).

- (20) Referring to “the amount of fabricated, false information that your voters were given by the leave campaign,” she said: “You know, **the big lie is a very potent tool, and we’ve somewhat kept it at bay in western democracies, partly because of the freedom of the press.**” (theguardian.com, 2017)
- (21) Why **the press should call out politicians when they lie** and why lying isn’t the same as talking nonsense. (*The Economist*, 2017)
- (22) But in an era of peer-to-peer communication, in which **a lie or a bluff can be exposed on the internet within minutes, it is destroying trust and respect**. (heraldscotland.com, 2018)
- (23) **Someone tells a lie, and it gets spread on Social Media, and it becomes the truth**. (prowrestling.net, 2019)
- (24) **Should Facebook run political adverts containing lies?** (*The Economist*, 2019)

In contemporary English texts, lying is often viewed from the axiological perspective, reflecting three points of view, i.e. ethical, emotional, and

psychophysical. From the ethical point of view, every lie, even an insignificant one, is considered immoral, shameful, and sinful (25–30). The main aspect that makes a lie unethical is its intentionality. In that respect, a lie is fundamentally different from an error, which is viewed more positively, as *errare humanum est* (28). The worst category of deception is that of the slanderous lie, aimed at harming an innocent person (29), and false public policy (30, 31).

- (25) **Don't lie, it makes you look amoral** – “**thou shalt not lie**”, after all. So remember, **no need to fib**, you'll embarrass yourself. (theregister.co.uk, 2020)
- (26) How often had he told me **a lie is always sinful and bad in itself**. (Ian Maitland, *Cathedral*, 1993)
- (27) At my school we were taught that **a lie is the intent to deceive**; and that you cannot be forgiven unless you are truly sorry and determined not to sin again. (dailymail.co.uk, 2016)
- (28) I know the difference between **an error – we all make them – and a lie. It's a malicious mis-statement**. (edinburghnews.scotsman.com, 2019)
- (29) People can be evil enough **to tell a lie about an innocent person**. (thesun.co.uk, 2019)
- (30) Like that, this is a refusal to discern good from evil, **true from false**, excrement from food, bread from stones or a viper. Such an attitude is not only a perversion – **it is disastrous for a state to be guided by such a lie**. (catholicherald.co.uk, 2011)
- (31) **To lie to the public [...] is the worst thing any government can do** (theguardian.com, 2017)

The negative image of lying is reinforced by its contextual associations with other pejorative words, such as *a cheat* (32), *a scam* (33), *sneaky* (34), *a cad*, *a charlatan* (35). The danger of lying, and so of the cultural concept LIE, also resides in its cascading nature,⁷ when a liar must continuously invent new deceptions to conceal the original one. In this way, a whole “cascade” of lies is formed, which results in an uncontrollable and therefore particularly dangerous spread of false information (36). It is metaphorically compared to a snowball (37), an epidemic (38), or a web (39).

- (32) Henry is **a liar and a cheat**. He should sizzle and then fry in the sun for what he has done. (joe.co.uk, 2019)
- (33) If someone who has asked you for money **tells you to lie to the bank or the police, this is a scam**. (birminghammail.co.uk, 2021)
- (34) You become **a liar and really sneaky** and I hated being that person as well. (bbc.co.uk, 2012)
- (35) You might, after giving it a bit of thought, have come up with Drogba and Lampard as the current Premier League record holders but I would dismiss as **a liar and a charlatan and a cad** all but the very boffinest of stat nerds who claimed to know this information off the top of their head. (football365.com, 2020)

⁷ The term *cascading nature of lie* was coined by Wojciech Chudy (2003).

- (36) Rupert Grint and Nick Frost team up for this dark comedy about **a lie that spirals out of control**. (chortle.co.uk, 2017)
- (37) The problem with telling a white lie is that you have to stick to your story [...]. **Never tell a fib, because it can snowball out of control**. (dailymail.co.uk, 2012)
- (38) **An epidemic of lying** is proving corrosive to liberal democracy. (*The Economist*, 2019)
- (39) **A web of lies**. Vladimir Putin's epic deceptions have grave consequences for his people and the outside world. (*The Economist*, 2014)

Other texts contain common conceptual metaphors of LIE IS VIOLENCE / LIE IS A CRIME / LIE IS DIRT, which strengthen the negative perception of the concept and reflect coercion (40) or emotional torture through lies (41). Lying in other texts is often criminalised: such contexts often speak of accusing a subject (not only a person but also the media or a state) of lying (42–44). This criminalisation is particularly observed in a common collocation *a serial liar*, analogous to *a serial killer* (45). Lying is often portrayed as a stain or dishonour on the liar (46, 47). Phrases such as *a serial liar*, or *the litany of falsehoods*, emphasise the already mentioned cascading nature of LIE and lying.

- (40) In a previous interview, Leanne told Birmingham Live how **she was forced to lie** to doctors, pretending she had been mugged at a cash point after suffering severe bruising to her eye socket. (birminghammail.co.uk, 2019)
- (41) **People do torture each other, they do lie to each other**. They do emotionally torture each other. [...] It can end up in horrible tragedy. (eonline.com, 2020)
- (42) By Sunday night, dozens of strangers were branding her **a criminal and a liar**, and claiming they had reported her to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the FBI. (dailymail.co.uk, 2017)
- (43) Normally when **a newspaper is guilty of an outright lie**, you get your lawyers and you go after them. (birminghammail.co.uk, 2021)
- (44) Dominic Raab **accuses EU of spreading lies** in Covid vaccine row. (thetimes.co.uk, 2021)
- (45) Rebel Wilson is suing Bauer Media over 'defamatory' articles published about her which she says painted her as **a serial liar**. (dailymail.co.uk, 2017)
- (46) Joanna Cherry has accused her fellow SNP MPs of pushing "**lies and smears**" and creating a culture that encourages threats against female politicians. (thetimes.co.uk, 2021)
- (47) First minister Nicola Sturgeon has pledged to tackle a "**litany of smear, innuendo and outright falsehoods**" when she testifies this month about her government's botched handling of harassment complaints against her predecessor. (thetimes.co.uk, 2021).

English texts contain numerous epithets reflecting the magnitude of lying, i.e. its gradation: *big, flagrant, monstrous, humungous, almighty, massive*, etc. (48–52). The majority of these epithets conceptualise lying as a powerful weapon or tool used for the subject's personal or political purposes:

- (48) ‘We plan on getting married in the near future!’ she **lied flagrantly**. (Angela Wells, Viking Magic, 1993)
- (49) Rick Perry’s “**monstrous lie**” (*The Economist*, 2011)
- (50) It’s wrong, I know, but there’s something thrilling about a really **humungous lie**. (spectator.co.uk, 2020)
- (51) With Stalinvast gone, any remaining evidence of the kindling of the hydra had been obliterated; and Jaq would need to think up **an almighty lie** to exonerate the command he gave, should official query ever reach him. (Ian Watson, *Inquisitor*, 1993)
- (52) Have you read the hugely discredited White Paper? You know the document they used to **massively lie** to the people of Scotland? (heraldscotland.com, 2016)

From the emotional point of view, lying is associated with shame and seen as disgraceful. Texts contain very strong vocabulary (even swear words), exclamatory sentences, expressing a particularly negative assessment of lying, especially in politics (53, 54, 60, 65, 66). It is particularly disgraceful to lie if a person occupies a high public office: politicians are expected to maintain the highest standards of moral values, honesty, and justice. Therefore, to accuse a politician of lying is one of the gravest accusations (53, 54). Texts also reveal the regret that the standards of fair policy have become a myth (55). The lie that constitute a particularly notorious category (often blamed on politicians) is a cynical one, also called *blatant*, *flagrant*, or *barefaced*, made without any attempt to conceal it, or persistently asserted even when disclosed or in the presence of obvious evidence to the contrary (56–60). Cynical lies are most often made by irreparable liars; they are metaphorised with the use of disease epithets: *pathological*, *chronic*, *compulsive* (61–63), which also convey the cascading nature of lie (64):

- (53) When Newt Gingrich, the former Republican leader, described Mr Obama as a “food stamp president”, the subtext was plain. It was too when Joe Wilson, a Republican lawmaker, interrupted Mr Obama’s address to Congress **to call him a liar – an indignity none of his predecessors suffered**. (ft.com, 2014)
- (54) Ask yourself: What other prime minister of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland could a national newspaper [...] splash across its front page the headline “**LIAR, CHEAT, CHARLATAN, NATIONAL EMBARRASSMENT, UNFIT FOR PUBLIC OFFICE**” and not trouble the libel lawyers? (theneweuropean.co.uk, 2021)
- (55) According to one of the great myths of American politics, **George Washington could not tell a lie**. No politician since has felt such compunction. (*The Economist*, 2019)
- (56) When he is challenged he lays the blame, like his father, at God’s door, but with a new and terrible cynicism and with **an outright lie**. (Trevor Dennis, *Lo and Behold! The Power Of Old Testament Storytelling*, 1991)
- (57) **Cynical and a proven liar**, unprincipled Boris Johnson is using the oldest trick in the Tory book by deciding to play statue wars. (theweek.co.uk, 2020)

- (58) So – you’re admitting to having told me **a blatant lie? A completely shameless one.** (Miriam Macgregor, *Wilder’s Wilderness*, 1993)
- (59) We saw with the expenses scandal just how **flagrantly Corbyn is prepared to lie.** And his supporters **still insist the lie is true, even though it’s a matter of public record** – and has been admitted by Jeffer – that it is diametrically opposed to the truth. (theregister.co.uk, 2019)
- (60) God, give me strength, **a barefaced liar promoted to our highest office!** (radiotimes.com, 2021)
- (61) He responded by describing Mr Trump as, variously, **a “pathological liar”** [...]. (independent.co.uk, 2016)
- (62) The Argentine government is seen domestically and internationally as **a chronic liar** [...]. (uk.reuters.com, 2013)
- (63) Next month, after celebrating holidays with family and ringing in the New Year with friends, Americans will watch **a compulsive liar** accused of sexual misconduct take the highest office in the nation. (theguardian.com, 2016)
- (64) **If Boris Johnson’s prepared to lie to the Queen, lie to the country,** you know, **I’m going to stop being shocked at where his lack of boundaries lies.** (theneweuropean.co.uk, 2019)
- (65) The Scouse flicked over a page of his cowboy book and continued reading as the three Commandos chorused, **‘You lying bastard’.** (Bill Millin, *Invasion*, 1991)
- (66) Given that Trump has repeatedly lied about the Daniels and McDougal payments – and given that he lies about virtually everything else, to the point that his own former personal lawyer described him as a **‘f****ing liar’** – why should we take his word over that of federal prosecutors? (dailymail.co.uk, 2019)

From the psychophysical point of view, lying is presented as very difficult, often revealed by certain telltale signs (67). When lying, a person is simulating false emotions and concealing the real ones, thus experiencing psychological discomfort that manifests itself in certain psychosomatic symptoms: altered facial expression, palpitations, changes in voice, etc. (67–69). The more complex the lie is, the more difficult it is to conceal, as the subject experiences a very strong emotional-psychological discomfort (70).

- (67) **Tell-tale signs:** Killer John Tanner’s appeal, pictured centre, for information about the murder of girlfriend Rachel McLean showed how **his face gave his lies away.** (dailymail.co.uk, 2012)
- (68) With wildly beating heart, before opening the shed door **I rehearse the lie** I am about to tell him – just like in drama – **including the correct tone of voice** [...]. (Ian Maitland, *Cathedral*, 1993)
- (69) ‘Why are you whispering? Are you afraid?’ he asked casually. ‘N-no – of course not,’ **she lied, irritated at being unable to keep the tremor from her voice.** (Miriam Macgregor, *Wilder’s Wilderness*, 1993)
- (70) Given limited cognitive resources and the difficulty of necessary multi-tasking during deception, we suggest that **emotional leakage is particularly likely to occur when the lie is complex** and/or associated with strong emotions to be concealed or falsified. (dailymail.co.uk, 2012)

Lying is also viewed from the psychological-social perspective as a positive or necessary element of life, used to protect, comfort, or help oneself or

someone else (71–73). Texts contain frequent collocations, e.g. *a white lie* and *a sweet lie*, which usually stand for a small harmless lie, often depicted as a necessary social courtesy (74, 75). White lies also perform an instrumental, sometimes psychological function: they are used to get out of an awkward position or simply to elevate self-esteem (76, 77). There is also a common collocation *a noble lie*. This category is presented as the benevolent deception *pro publico bono*, usually created by politicians to pursue higher goals: public welfare, moral standards, peace, health, etc., sometimes even with a liar's sacrifice of his personal goals (78–80). However, even such a noble lie is mostly condemned in the texts; the collocation is often used in quotation marks, thus emphasizing the dubious nature of this category of deception. The texts mention the long-term harmfulness of any lie, emphasizing that sincerity and truth are the most important elements of any policy (80–82):

- (71) **Aye, it's right to tell a lie to protect a friend, Will, it is necessary to lie sometimes.** (Iris Gower, *The Shoemaker's Daughter*, 1992)
- (72) While his life-long friend Mr Goldberg said it was a "daily lottery to survive" and believes **his life was probably saved by a man who advised him to lie** about his age when Nazi officers were deciding who was fit for work and those who would die. (countypress.co.uk, 2021)
- (73) **Seeing how broken she is, he chooses to lie to her**, telling her the group is fine and that they made a deal with them like the Kingdom has. (thenerdrecites.com, 2017)
- (74) Explain to the birthday celebrant you have been looking for a particular special item for their birthday and it is on its way – while this may not be totally truthful **sometimes a harmless white lie is socially acceptable** [...]. (dailymail.co.uk, 2016)
- (75) **Sweet little lies.** Deception itself is driven by complex chemical processes – **not all of them maliciously motivated** [...]. (*The Economist*, 2014)
- (76) Once out of the office she had all the time in the world and no one to help fill it. But at least **the white lie had got her out of her moment of confusion.** (Kate Kingston, *A Warning of Magic*, 1993)
- (77) Elderly, softly spoken Mr Crawford in that rather Dickensian office in the City was a far cry from this. But **her self-esteem needed the prop of that little white lie.** (Kate Kingston, *A Warning of Magic*, 1993)
- (78) Since these neoconservatives were largely of secular backgrounds, a few commentators have speculated that this – along with support for religion generally – may have been a case of a "**noble lie**", **intended to protect public morality, or even tactical politics, to attract religious supporters.** (marketoracle.co.uk, 2012)
- (79) Plato held truth to be the goal of philosophy and the ultimate standard that disciplines the soul. But even he acknowledged that people can not take very much of it, and that **peaceful government depends on "the noble lie"**. (spectator.co.uk, 2017)
- (80) It might be argued that **exaggerating NHS capacity is a noble lie**: that it may be unduly alarmist, but **would prompt people to change behaviour and**

- slow the threat of Covid.** [...] Honesty is needed when discussing public health because the lack of it can cost lives. (spectator.co.uk, 2020)
- (81) The most sympathetic explanation is that [the leaders] are telling a “noble lie”, provoked by a fear that we – the general public – are a lynch mob in waiting. **“Noble” or not, this lie is a mistake.** (spectator.co.uk, 2015)
- (82) **This sounds dangerously like a Noble Lie defence – the idea that it is okay to make things up, to spread fibs, if one is doing it in the service of some greater good. The idea of the “good lie”, the lie which helps open people’s eyes to the existence of wickedness, should be anathema** to anyone who cares about getting history right and establishing the truth. (telegraph.co.uk, 2013)

Texts also express the ambiguous assessment of lying in terms of human nature. Firstly, they mention the natural biological condemnation of lies, e.g. children do not divide them into positive or negative ones: every lie seems unacceptable to them at first, however, their moral perception of lying changes over time (83). Secondly, other texts express a certain fatalism: lying is portrayed there as an innate flaw of human nature, impossible to correct (85, 86). Texts may also reflect the possibility of learning lies and morally taming them (83, 86):

- (83) **Telling a small lie to spare someone from bad feelings may seem like the right thing to do, but ask a young child, and your actions might not be considered so virtuous.** In a new study, researchers found **children’s perception of truth and lies changes over time.** (dailymail.co.uk, 2016)
- (84) Let’s be honest: you are **a natural born liar.** So am I. Whether we tell little white lies, designed to spare another’s feelings, or whopping great pathological fibs, **none of us can escape the inherent human tendency for untruths.** (telegraph.co.uk, 2019)
- (85) A study of 1,000 Brits found that 68% of people **believe it’s part of human nature to lie** to those closest to us [...]. (www.aol.co.uk, 2016)
- (86) The rate at which **individual children learned to deceive was related to certain cognitive skills.** [...] (dailymail.co.uk, 2017)

In English texts, lying is also viewed from an existential perspective. The existential lie can be conscious (hypocrisy) and unconscious (self-deception). In the former case, lying is often metaphorically viewed as a foundation of something, not only of the human life, but also of political systems, religions, or human relations (87–89). It is emphasised, however, that such foundations are not solid, thus making a caricature of everything that is constructed upon it, namely relationships, personal victories, pride, or faith (89–92). The texts contain the common collocation *live a lie*. Such false life is the one that does not correspond to a person’s real state (economic, sexual, or psychological) (93–95). Such life is considered particularly difficult since a person experiences an existential crisis (96). Escaping such a “double life” brings great relief (94, 97); however, it is not easy, as one must have the

courage to acknowledge one's weaknesses and face the possibility of social exclusion (98):

- (87) **I built my life on a lie.** (Patricia Wilson, *A Healing Fire*, 1993)
- (88) **Dictatorships have always been built on lies.** (*The Economist*, 2019)
- (89) [...] not only is Steve's rock-themed wedding about as wrong as it could be, but **their entire relationship is built on a lie.** (theguardian.com, 2015)
- (90) **To win any race based on a lie** would, for me, be a personal defeat. I could never let that happen. (aol.co.uk, 2018)
- (91) Yes, it's convenient, but it is false. **We can not build pride upon a lie.** (scot-smann.com, 2017)
- (92) Other people have a concept of God so fundamentally false that it would be better for them to doubt than to remain devout. **The more devout they are, the uglier their faith will become since it is based on a lie.** (Os Guinness, *Doubt*, 1976)
- (93) All this backpacking, **pretending you are poor, when really you could go and dine in the finest restaurant, check into a five-star hotel, or just fly home whenever you wanted**, really was a waste of time. Worse, **it was a lie.** (theguardian.com, 2017)
- (94) But **I was living a lie and knew a sex change would bring me the peace I craved.** (mirror.co.uk, 2011)
- (95) Most importantly, **be yourself. There's nothing worse than having to keep up a lie.** (independent.co.uk, 2013)
- (96) But while we all need a break from this intensity, this part of Cambridge life has caused many an existential crisis concerning **how differently we navigate our home lives from uni, as if we are "living a lie" in one of them.** (varsity.co.uk, 2017)
- (97) Those that know him best maintain that **Forrest has never been happier** since his arrest and subsequent jail term **because he no longer feels he is living a lie.** (express.co.uk, 2014)
- (98) Do you want to continue **to live a lie?** Or do you **have the courage to show your weaknesses and face the possibility of rejection?** (Stephanie Spindler, *Learn to Live*, 1991)

In the latter case, self-deception is a particular category of lying (and of the cultural concept of LIE) when its subject and object coincide, and a person does not realise the deception. Thus, the aspect of intentionality is absent (99). Textual data reveal various causes of self-deception: sometimes a person is trapped in it after persistently lying to others (100); self-deception is also used as an escape technique from acknowledging a harsh reality (101), and sometimes it acts as social conformism, when personal beliefs are abandoned in favour of universally accepted truths and standards (102). Self-deception is presented as a particularly dangerous phenomenon because it creates the illusion of security: people keep lying to themselves, being convinced that they know the truth (103). However, such a conviction lets them fall into the trap of self-deception, since lying to oneself is very easy (104):

- (99) Ferrante explores **the lies we tell, to others and ourselves**. (bbc.com, 2020)
- (100) [...] **I'd just have to think up a good lie [...] and stick to it until perhaps I'd begin to believe it myself**. (Lynne Reid Banks, *The L-Shaped Room*, 1987)
- (101) **We're all suckers for a countdown clock. Don't lie to yourself, it's true**. (pcgamer.com, 2019)
- (102) When citizens fail to hold their leaders accountable for blatant lies, false narratives, and despicable propaganda storylines, they become evil themselves. **They lie to themselves in order to go along with the crowd and appear normal**. (marketoracle.co.uk, 2017)
- (103) **I lie to myself all the time. But I never believe me**. (theguardian.com, 2015)
- (104) [...] **it's easier to lie to yourself than to a coach**. (cyclingweekly.com, 2019)

Conclusions

Contemporary English texts reveal numerous profiles of the cultural concept of LIE. The most salient profile, observed in the absolute majority of the contexts is (1) **the political LIE**, commonly associated with the phenomenon of post-truth, having the dominant aspects of function (lying in this sense occurs for certain political, often pragmatic purposes), direction (where lying can be directed towards the past, the present or the future), opposition (where a political lie is opposed to journalistic truth, and independent media are presented as the main guardians of the truth). The texts also reveal other salient profiles: (2) **LIE as anti-value**, with the dominant axiological aspect (lying perceived as sinful and evil), the intentional aspect (lying perceived as an intentional deception), the emotional aspect (lying associated with malicious, negative emotions, e.g. shame), the quantitative aspect (lies may be numerous), the aspect of gradation (lies may be “bigger” or “smaller”); (3) **the positive LIE as a psychological-social act of diplomacy**, with the dominant functional aspect (lying serves to pursue noble goals or help the subject or others), the aspect of gradation (lying is considered small and harmless); (4) **the existential LIE as insincere life**, involving the sub-profiles **LIE as hypocrisy** and **LIE as self-deception**.

The analysis of contemporary textual data revealed the following cognitive definition of the English cultural concept of LIE:

LIE it is an ethical-psychological-political concept, particularly associated with an intentional distortion of reality, the purpose of which is to deceive. Therefore it is usually considered unethical, morally unacceptable and axiologically negative, often criminalised. On the other hand, lying is not always condemned; there are categories of the white lie (which is a condition for functioning in the society successfully) or the noble lie (which pursues benevolent goals). Lying is also an integral part of politics, where it is commonly

associated with post-truth, including all its elements and strategies. There is also a category of the existential lie as insincerity, as living a “double life”, when a person’s inner thoughts and values do not correspond to his or her words and deeds. The existential lie involves hypocrisy or self-deception.

Corpora

British National Corpus (BNC)
News on the Web Corpus (NOW)

Dictionaries

Cambridge English Dictionary (CED)
Collins Dictionary (CD)
Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE)
Macmillan English Dictionary (MED)
Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (OALD)
Oxford English Dictionary (OED)

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Pojęcie KŁAMSTWA we współczesnych tekstach angielskich

Streszczenie: W artykule podjęto próbę rekonstrukcji językowo-kulturowego obrazu konceptu LIE ‘kłamstwo’ obecnego we współczesnych tekstach angielskich. Badanie przeprowadzono z wykorzystaniem metodologii S-A-T lubelskiej szkoły etnolingwistycznej. Wyróżniono semantyczne aspekty konceptu LIE w danych tekstowych, zinterpretowano je i wyodrębniono jego profile semantyczne. Opracowane dane obejmują konteksty wyekscerpowane z brytyjskiego korpusu British National Corpus (BNC), korpusu medialnego News on the Web (NOW) oraz innych tekstów prasowych i internetowych. Badania wskazały, iż koncept LIE we współczesnych tekstach angielskich ujmowany jest głównie z perspektywy politycznej, gdzie łączy się ściśle ze zjawiskiem post-prawdy. Teksty zawierają także różne profile konceptu LIE i jego niejednoznaczną ocenę aksjologiczną. Choć kłamstwo ogólnie uznaje się za nieetyczne i moralnie niedopuszczalne (czyli jest wartościowane negatywnie), to jednak jest ono także postrzegane jako trwały element życia społecznego i nieodłączny atrybut polityki.

Słowa kluczowe: LIE, KŁAMSTWO; językowy obraz świata; konceptualizacja; dane tekstowe