

Status of the Ukrainian Language in the Context of Global Challenges and Military Aggression (Based on the Material of the Modern English-Language Press)

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Received: December 8, 2022

Accepted: January 18, 2023

Online Published: February 14, 2023

doi:10.5430/wjel.v13n2p242

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v13n2p242>

Abstract

Russia's military aggression against Ukraine has globally transformed the media landscape. Facing global challenges, the world's media began to continuously publicize the unacceptable violations and catastrophic Russian armed aggression consequences. On February 24, 2022, Russia attacked Ukraine, and these events prompted both Ukrainian and global journalists to refocus on wartime conditions. This work is a compilation of theoretical and methodological approaches that may be useful for the study of the discourse transformations within media discourse. The work is time-limited, but it is during the period in question that the "language issue" roared throughout the pages. The idea of combining the concept of discourse, sociolinguistics, and lexico-semantics to understand the discursive and linguistic event was proposed. These methodologies were grouped around ideas that recognize the relevance of English-language mass media. To study a linguistic event such as the Ukrainian war, the empirical part aimed to illustrate how proceedings such as guilt, linguistic conflict, can be investigated by methods of discourse analysis and other linguistic phenomena. Such a constructivist approach develops the working hypothesis that nomination (as a discursive record) varies according to the work and sociopolitical stakes of the speaker.

Keywords: journalistic discourse, lexico-semantics, concept, information war, language conflict

1. Introduction

1.1 Linguistic Propaganda in Hybrid Warfare

In response to Russian language propaganda military aggression and hybrid warfare, the European media, as well as the world media, became acutely interested in the Ukrainian language and its status. Scholars in different humanitarian fields got interested in history, language, culture, and in general in Ukraine, which became a global phenomenon. Note (Makhortykh & Bastian, 2022), exploring the causes of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, scholars appeal to the fact that the state became independent in 1991, was a multinational one. There the largest nationality was the Russian minority, accounting for 17% of the population. At the same time, scholars note that this is not a large number, but that is not why the issue of the Russian language has been a problem from the early moments of Ukrainian independence to the present day. The efforts of the tsar and the Soviet empire have had a much greater effect in Ukraine than among the Baltic and Caucasian peoples not related to the Russians. According to scholars, the main reason is the Ukrainian and Russian languages closeness, so it is relatively easy for ordinary Ukrainians to learn Russian. At the same time (Brusylovska & Maksymenko) write that the share of Ukrainian nationality in Ukraine is much higher than that of those who recognize Ukrainian as their native language, and the number of Russian-speakers share is much higher than of citizens of Russia. This is a polemic question, because according to the first and unified census of the population of Ukraine in 2001, 5.6 million of 37.5 million citizens of Ukrainian nationality considered Ukrainian their native language. But the linguistic situation is complicated by the fact that due to close Ukrainian-Russian social and linguistic ties over the centuries, a mixed Ukrainian-Russian language (surzhik) has developed and is used by many people. According to the analysis (Melnyk, Holoiukh, Kalishchuk & Levchuk, 2020), the basis of Surzhuk shows Ukrainian language grammatical structure, but it is also characterized by the presence of many Russian words, expressions, grammatical structures, as well as often Russian pronunciation and accent. (Maniou, 2022) analyzes the situation with the printed press and with books. The author writes

that according to a 2015 survey, the share of Ukrainian-language press products was only about 10%, and as of 2019, it increased to 90%. So, one considers the problem of the “language issue” in the information war relevant. The global interest concerning Ukraine has its reflection in the mass media. The novelty of the work lies in the possible disclosure of the information war problem, the main tool here is the Ukrainian language, based on sociolinguistic, linguo-cognitivist, and lexico-semantic approaches. The English-language mass media study on the designation of the concept “information war” and “language issue” had the studied phenomenon. The newspapers texts, genre and military-publicist texts analysis is an important means to study the structural and semantic features of the coverage of this problem in the aspect of translation.

1.2 The Concepts of “Information Warfare” and “Language Issue”

The relevance of the work is determined by the acute interest of linguistic research of the concept “information war” and “language issue” in the modern English newspaper discourse in light of the reflection of military events in Ukraine. The work aims to analyze the use of means of verbalization of these concepts in English-language mass media from the perspective of linguistic and semantic aspects. The task is to investigate the literature on the linguistic status of the Ukrainian language; to choose the most influential English-language mass media covering military events in Ukraine; to analyze the scientific literature involved in the study of the concepts; to characterize the language means for denoting the concepts related to the war; to describe the structural and semantic means, to build a lexical and semantic field of the concept “informational guilt” as well as to identify key thematic groups in the selected English-language mass media.

1.3 Language Restrictions in War

The war caused as devastation, destruction, displacement, and massacres, inevitably affects people’s fate, as well as the fate of the languages they speak. In many conflicts, the question of languages, their status, their teaching, and their future are central. The situation of languages and their speakers itself gives rise to conflicts (Viberg, 2020). If languages are affected by wars and conflicts, they can become weapons of war designed to justify and legitimize the actions of warring parties. But languages are also a reflection of information warfare (Vorbrugg & Bluwstein, 2022). The Serbo-Croatian language (Paravina, 2022) is illustrative enough to demonstrate the way how a language can be voluntarily differentiated in a process of linguistic individuation, which can go as far as choosing two different alphabets (Latin in Croatia and Cyrillic in Serbia) to write it. One distinguishes two factors determining the dual relationship between war and languages. The first factor is the close connection between language and group identity. The language is part of identity, the individuals and communities speech construction. This relationship is the subject of interdisciplinary research, where psychology, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, and sociolinguistics occupy a privileged place. Language philosophers such as Humboldt, Herder, and Heidegger were the first to note the importance of language for national identity (Putri & Fitrawati, 2020). According to Rațiu & Munteanu (2018), language serves an identity function. As an identity card, the language we speak and the way we speak reveals something about us: our cultural, social, ethnic, professional situation, our age group, our geographical origin, etc., it speaks about our identity, that is, speech is our difference.

Like this, languages shape the national way of world seeing, providing society with information and reality understanding, information developed by the experience of the linguistic group. In fact, languages, saturated with the different points of view of their speakers, contain a certain vision of the world through the categorization and naming of elements of reality. These functions make language the sole relay of the other components of a group's identity, whether expressed through folklore, culture, religion, history, etc. (Can & Cangır, 2022). Language is superior to other elements insofar as it is able to name, express, and communicate them. The second factor is related to the language performativity, as demonstrated by theories of speech acts. In addition to its communicative function, a language is also a form of action on the world. Changing human perceptions and systems of thought and belief, the speech undoubtedly changes the relationship with the world. Many studies emphasize the role of language in mass mobilization and resistance to the enemy during the war (Chernobrov & Briant, 2022).

1.4 State Hypotheses

The paper suggests that war marks the fate of languages. The coverage of events in Ukraine and the “language issue”, certain characteristics of the situation with the Ukrainian language make it a good example to illustrate how language can be affected by war and how it itself can affect the course of the war. The work hypothesizes that by examining the lexical units of the context, it is possible to identify common, important key themes on a global level.

2. Method

This study was based on a dual complementary approach: first a sociolinguistic approach, which allowed us to study the current linguistic policy, and status in the context of the coverage of global events related to the war in Ukraine on the material of the English-language mass media, was applied. A special attention is paid to the language evolution both linguistic and sociolinguistic phenomena. Secondly, the pragmatic approach to the study of the influence of war on the level of discourse, as well as the influence of discourse on the war, namely, lexico-semantic analysis of the concepts “information war” and “language issue” in the English-language mass media was applied.

The comparative method was used. It consisted in comparing lexical, lexico-grammatical, and grammatical structures in English to analyze the specificity of contextual-interpretative and semantic parameters. The descriptive method and the method of transformational analysis made it possible to identify the lexical-semantic field, thematic groups, and subgroups.

2.2 Participant (Subject) Characteristics

The most powerful British mass media were selected for the work: the Times, The Guardian, The Independent, The Telegraph, the tabloids The Sun, The Daily Mail, The Daily Mirror, in addition, The Observer, The Sunday Times.

The work consisted in a comprehensive review of the means of verbalization of the concepts "information war" and "language issue" in the English-language newspaper discourse and in identifying the main most used key lexemes involved in the selected concepts.

Approximately 600 different media genres in English-language electronic and print media from February 24, 2022, through April 18, 2022 were analyzed. This period is very important because namely during this period the Kremlin rhetoric insisted that the conflict began because of the "language issue". Subsequently, as we know, Russian rhetoric has changed several times. A continuous sampling of nouns of their syntagmatic partners of the semantic field of the concept "information war", sentences or sentence segments in which nouns belonging to the lexico-semantic field "language issue" are used, was carried out. The nouns classification by thematic groups (hereinafter referred to as TG) (and their subgroups) was carried out. And classification of verbs - syntagmatic partners into groups and subgroups. Interpretation of the study results consists in deepening the idea of semantic processes and ways of an embodiment of the opinion of the English-language mass media in the organization of the lexical material in the covered wars in Ukraine and the language issue.

3. Results

The Ukrainian crisis, just emerging, has taken a key place in journalistic discourse, at least in Western countries and Europe. Since February 24, 2022, speeches about the Ukrainian war have been actively present in the media. The supposedly initiated conflict about the "language issue" becomes number one on the world's pages. The second place in the mass media occupied the European sanctions against Russia and the Russian "response" against Western countries. These issues dominate the media discourse. In this context Vusyk (2022) emphasizes on one more actual topic in terms of war – the aggression. The author analyzes the expression of verbal aggression in the Ukrainian mass media during the Russian-Ukrainian war. In mid-March, the deterioration of the overall situation due to hostilities between the Russian and Ukrainian armies initiated a new discourse in the media arena: Russia is "saving Russian-speaking Ukrainians" with nuclear weapons. Against this background, a real information war is brewing between the West's unrest and the discourse of nuclear threats from Russia.

3.1 Recruitment

Thus, the task was to identify the key thematic group of the lexical-semantic field of the concept "information war" among a large number of articles devoted to the war in Ukraine. Through a continuous sampling of nouns of the thematic group of the concept "information war" it was formed an inventory of 3913 lexical units, classified into 19 thematic groups:

1. Names - 1189 L.N.: Ukraine - 595, Russia - 594;
2. Language issue - 671 L.N.: Ukrainian language - 326, Russian-speaking population - 150, censorship - 114, language patriotism - 81;
3. Names of people - 638 L.N.: enemy - 190, victim - 172, army - 21, politicians - 67;
4. Space - 442 L.N.: occupied territory - 356, sea - 67, sky - 19;
5. Food - 420 L.N.: grain - 212, sugar - 114, oil - 58, bread - 40;
6. Surface - 353 L.N.: peninsula - 181, mountains - 76, relief - 86;
7. Settlement - 162 L.N.: cities - 146, small settlements - 16;
8. Items - 365 L.N.: atomic weapons - 116, rockets - 115, bairaktar - 55, howitzers - 24, fighter jet - 19, weapons - 15;
9. Waters - 113 L.N.: sea - 93, rivers - 20;
10. Ways - 96 L.N.: border - 75, traces of nature - 21;
11. Physical and mental condition - 76 L.N.: fear - 19, despair - 16, unhappiness - 16, fright - 15, fatigue - 10;
12. Buildings - 63 L.N.: houses - 20, high-rise buildings - 30, private houses - 13;
13. Color - 44 L.N.: blue - 8, yellow - 16, white - 10, red - 9, green - 1;
14. Body parts - 20 L.N.: eyes - 2, skin - 8, heart - 2, legs - 8;
15. Sounds - 15 L.N.: explosion - 8, whistle - 2, shout - 5;
16. Smells - 15 L.N.: cadaveric smell - 6, living things - 6, fire - 3;
17. Mythical creatures - 13 L.N.: God - 1, shamans - 3, demons - 9;
18. Food - 4 L.N.: bread - 2, water - 2;
19. Other phenomena - 24 L.N.: silence - 7, life - 4, death - 2, Bible - 2, prayer - 2, fasting - 1, Christians - 2, steps - 2, vendetta - 1.

So, the largest thematic group was the TG of proper names - 1189 L.N., and the second was the linguistic issue. The presence of such a large number of lexical units, their diversity, their belonging to different TGs proves the unprecedentedness and importance of the designated events.

3.2 Statistics and Data Analysis

In order to deepen the study of the concept “language issue” it was necessary to study the distribution of lexical units, constituting the appropriate thematic group. By means of continuous sampling, verbs were identified. Verbs, in their turn, were divided into basic TGs according to the principle of characterization in terms of the meaning of grammatical forms and syntactic functions. Thus, the following classification of verbs of the studied lexical-semantic field of the concept “information war” was obtained (Fig. 1):

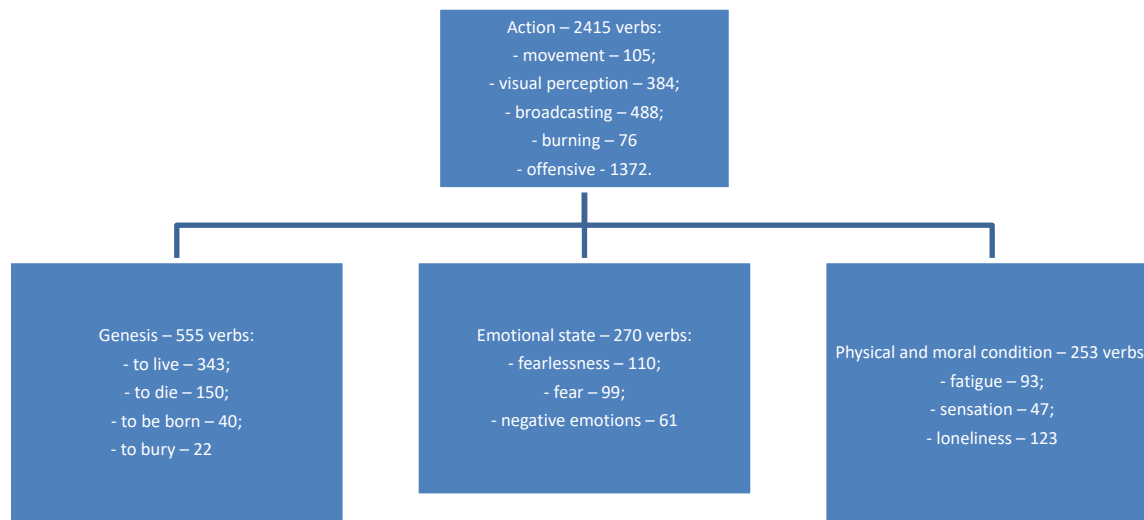


Figure 1. Distribution of verbs in coverage of the war in Ukraine in the English-speaking masses

Figure: author's own development

Thus, the largest TG was the action TG, among which the largest subgroups were the offensive and speech subgroups: *Ukraine - Ukrainian - offensive - speech*

3.3 Ancillary Analyses

One can conclude that the English-language strips cover the war identically faithfully under the code of the Ukrainian language (Table 1).

Table 1. Lexical-semantic field of the concept “Information Warfare”

Syntagmus Partners TG	Action - 2415	Genesis - 55	Emotional state - 270	Physical and Moral Condition - 253	Without verbs - 356	In general, the nouns
1. Proper Names	532	209	226	99	123	1189
2. Language issue	156	43	-	15	35	671
3. Names of people	411	40	44	65	78	638
4. Space	300	40	-	12	90	442
5. Food	380	17	-	2	30	429
6. Surface	162	53	-	-	-	352
7. Settlement	77	63	-	-	22	162
8. Items	70	40	-	25	27	162
9. Waters	60	11	-	20	22	113
10. Ways	87	-	-	-	9	96
11. Phys. and Mental State	56	10	-	10	-	76
12. Buildings	38	5	-	-	25	68
13. Color	37	7	-	-	-	44
14. Body parts	19	1	-	-	-	20
15. Sounds	2	-	-	5	4	15
16. Smells	-	5	-	-	10	15
17. Myth creatures	10	3	-	-	-	13
18. Food	-	-	-	-	4	4
19. Other phenomena	18	6	-	-	-	24

Table: author's own development.

The dominant meaning of the semantic structure of the field of the concept “information war” was determined by classifying the vocabulary from the selected English-language mass media, used in relation to the central theme “language issue”. Out of 138,285 lexical units of the studied materials, 3,944 (about 3%) nouns belong to the lexical field “guilt”. They are divided into 19 TGs, each of which, in

turn, is divided into certain subgroups. Also, about 138285 verbs, of which about 3913 (about 3%) are verbs belonging to the lexical-semantic field “war”. The verbs are divided into 5 main TGs, each of which, in turn, is divided into one or another subgroup.

4. Discussion

When talking about event naming and its linguistic construction, it is necessary to define the discourse context in terms of which one seeks to understand events in relation to language through human experience (Kelly, Footitt & Salama-Carr, 2019). Each academic field will interpret discourse differently. For a historian, for example, defining a (historical) event would require other parameters. Either way, the focus would be on the coverage of certain events (Rațiu & Munteanu, 2018). The nature of the action can be personal and social. In order to convey the meaning of the event, it is possible to assess the time before and after the event. However, large “scale” events presented in the media acquire their social status as an event in discourse (Haq, Tyson, Lee, Braud & Hui, 2022). It is the discourse that can construct semantic associations that convey direct or hidden meanings. War as a large-scale event forms many abstract concepts. And its proper linguistic understanding allows the perception of this event. The war in Ukraine exists in the physical world as a concept. In this perspective Khoroshko, Artemov, Opirskyi, Brailovskyi & Ivanchenko (2020) speak of self-referentiality. For a social fact to exist and be accepted by people, they must believe in it and accept its existence. A conflict is only a conflict if you believe in it (Pavlik, 2022). This is made possible through language and native speakers. Events, as we recognize them in this work, require their recognition as events expressed through language, which is itself a social institution. According to (Park, Mendelsohn, Field & Tsvetkov, 2022), a raw fact becomes an event only when it is recognized as such in discourse. Some events, such as the war in Ukraine (the associative sense of conflict), would have no meaning outside of constitutive rules and outside of the context that denotes them. Conflict usually consists of facts of the physical world, but it cannot be understood or categorized without human interaction. Su et al. (2022) emphasize the cognitive status of the event and view it as an empirical given, everything that happens to humans. The authors argue that empirical data do not contain prior to their perceptual emergence. Events, like data, cannot be understood a priori. They become representational through imagination, experience sensitive, and in the time and space of human communication (Talabi, Aiyesimoju, Lamidi, Bello, Okunade, Ugwuoke, & Gever, 2022). The war in Ukraine is a crisis, a global event because it is classified and covered in human discourse - in the mass media. All linguistic events analysis focuses on cognitive dynamics and on the historical process of knowledge through which we use expressions to refer to something and/or someone (Stănescu, 2022). It is necessary to understand the referential status of things, which create the connection between the empirical reality of language and the discursive production of meaning (ibid.). Consequently, the study of the speech event can be approached through the producers of meaning within a continuum, where the event is authenticated at particularly distinct points (Romanyshyn, 2020).

The analysis of this paper clearly shows that lexical units, which are involved in the lexico-semantic field of the concept “information war” and form one of the most thematic groups “language issue”, are used in a specific way in media discourse. In order to confirm the working hypothesis different methodologies are combined in the work. It is clear that the use of nominations in journalistic discourse varies according to the speaker, and here, according to the speaking collective of the magazines under study. Not only the nominations differ but also the social meaning they evoke in relation to the discursive referent. This variation of meaning that these nominations indicate in discourse is often manifested through reference to previous collective memories. And the positions that speakers occupy in the nomination are actualized in the dialogic dynamics of publicist discourse and through various aspects. This paper analyzes some 600 different media genres of English-language electronic and print media from February 24, 2022, to April 18, 2022. In particular, the most powerful British mass media: newspapers “Times”, “The Guardian”, magazines “The Independent”, “The Telegraph”, tabloids “The Sun”, “The Daily Mail”, “The Daily Mirror”, in addition, “The Observer”, “The Sunday Times”. Ukraine and the Ukrainian language occupied the main pages, becoming a symbol of the will to live and total freedom. One of the most frequently covered topics at the beginning of the war was precisely the language issue and the status of the Ukrainian language, due to incomprehensible accusations from Russia regarding the language issue as a form of information warfare. The paper analyzes the lexical and semantic field of the concept “information war” to identify the key thematic groups in the coverage of the war in Ukraine by the English-language mass media.

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