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Manipulation of lexical choice aspects in the creation of stereotypes and ideas in Russian propaganda

Маніпуляція аспектами лексичного вибору у створенні стереотипів та уявлень у російській пропаганді

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Abstract


The aim of the research is to analyse the mechanisms of manipulation of lexical choice aspects in the creation of mass stereotypes and ideas in Russian propaganda (based on examples of the analysis of Russian mass media and blogs). The research employed the methods of quantitative, comparative, and statistical analysis. In the course of the study, results were obtained in the form of a count of lexical units used in five sources of Russian propaganda and an assessment of their meaning. The results give reason to draw a conclusion about the use of certain lexical choices (euphemisms, emotionally charged vocabulary, slogans, hate speech, historical myths and falsifications) by Russian propaganda to redefine military realities and justify the war crimes of the Russian occupation army. The academic novelty of the study is the selected various academic sources to illustrate the imperial thinking of Russian mass media correspondents. Prospects. Further research may diversify the materials for the lexical analysis of the mechanisms of Russian propaganda in mass media.

Keywords: propaganda materials, lexemes, lexical choice, manipulation of consciousness, propaganda, word combinations.

Анотація

Метою дослідження є аналіз механізмів маніпуляції аспектами лексичного вибору у створенні масових стереотипів та уявлень у російській пропаганді (на прикладі аналізу російських ЗМІ та блогів). У дослідженні використано кількісний, компаративістичний та метод статистичного аналізу. В ході дослідження, отримано результати у вигляді підрахунку лексичних одиниць, використовуваних у п'яти джерелах російської пропаганди, та оцінці їхнього значення. Результати дають підставу зробити висновок про використання певного лексичного вибору (евфемізми, емоційно забарвлена лексика, гасла, мова ворожнечі, історичні міфи та фальсифікації) російською пропагандою для перевизначення військових реалій та виправдання воєнних злочинів російської окупаційної армії. Наукова новизна дослідження полягає у виборі різноманітних наукових джерел для ілюстрації імперського мислення дописувачів російських ЗМІ. Перспективи: Майбутні дослідження зможуть урізноманітнити матеріали для лексичного аналізу механізмів російської пропаганди в ЗМІ.

Ключові слова: агітаційні матеріали, лексеми, лексичний вибір, маніпуляція свідомістю, пропаганда, словосполучення.

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Introduction

Relevance

In connection with the active phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Ukrainians face new challenges in terms of the need for not only physical, but also informational self-defence against hostile propaganda. It is important to analyse the mechanisms of propaganda used in mass media, official sources and speeches of public figures of the Russian Federation in order to understand how to build counter-propaganda mechanisms.

The need to define the term “lexical choice” is significant. A. Lan and I. Paraboni characterize lexical choice as “the task of choosing words to express the meaning of a representation of a particular definition” (Lan & Paraboni, 2018, 2999). Accordingly, researchers characterize the phenomenon of lexicalization of descriptions as the implementation of the task of selecting the most relevant signifiers for a certain described concept. We observe the phenomenon of linguistic variability in the selection of certain characteristics of an object or phenomenon, which may change depending on the speaker’s perspective. This gives grounds to draw a conclusion about the dependence of the interpretation of information by perceivers in a certain way depending on the lexical choice of media representatives or other figures who shape public opinion.

A corpus study is usually carried out for the analysis of lexical choice, which is based on the collection of linguistic samples, most often used to denote a particular phenomenon (Lan & Paraboni, 2018, 2999). In this study, the methodology will be distinguished by focusing not only on the lexical meanings of certain myths of Russian propaganda, but on the contexts of their use and the purpose of using certain characteristics to create a false media reality.

In connection with the active phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Ukrainians face new challenges regarding the need to protect not only physical but also informational space from aggressive propaganda. In the modern world, information has become a potent weapon capable of influencing consciousness and people’s thoughts and actions. Understanding this, Russia uses propaganda as a critical tool to achieve its political goals. The article mainly focuses on analysing one of the main aspects of Russian propaganda - the manipulation of lexical choice. The study’s primary purpose is to reveal how,

through the skilful use of certain words and expressions, Russia forms stereotypes and ideas that are beneficial to it and how this affects society’s perception of reality.

Unexplored issues

Issues that currently require research and analysis are the nature of the use by representatives of the Russian authorities of the lexical choice of residents of certain territories for geopolitical purposes: in order to justify their own imperialist actions in the form of occupation of the territories of other states. The academic novelty of the research is the examination of the imperialist nature of not only the official propaganda of the Russian government, but also the latent and conquering thinking of representatives of the opposition mass media and blogs of the Russian Federation. Researchers usually focus on the use of the language issue only with the aim of establishing a totalitarian system directly by the Russian authorities, forgetting about the imperial thinking of opposition representatives as well, which leads to the need to abolish Russian culture in a broader sense, without attempting to search for its more conscious representatives.

Aim

The aim of the study is to analyse the mechanism of manipulation of lexical choice aspects in the creation of stereotypes and ideas in Russian propaganda.

Objectives/questions

The aim of the research implied the fulfilment of the following research objectives:

1. Describe the nature of the manipulation of aspects of lexical choice in the rhetoric of the official sources of the party representing the Russian government - All-Russian Political Party “United Russia”.
2. Analyse the use of lexical choice to appeal to the myth of the unity of peoples in the propaganda carried out by the media resources of the Russian occupation administrations in the temporarily occupied territories;
3. Demonstrate the discovery of imperial mythologemes in the worldview of even apparently oppositional Russian bloggers and media figures.

Literature review

Means of Russian propaganda are the subject of lexical analysis of a significant number of studies. Furthermore, the use of certain lexemes to spread narratives broadcast by the Kremlin authorities is analysed.

First of all, there are theoretical studies of the use of the “lexical choice” category. In particular, A. Lan and I. Paraboni analyse the specifics of the lexical choice made by different individuals when describing the features of identical human faces. The phenomenon of lexicalization of descriptions illustrates the variety of epithets used by a person to describe the same object or phenomenon according to the five most common psychological dimensions of human personality – openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Lan & Paraboni, 2018, 3000).

Apart from that, A. Hampton and V. Shalin (2017) analyse the factors of lexical choice among synonyms of certain characteristics of phenomena described in the media. The terms which are most often chosen among antonym pairs to describe natural disasters were identified using the example of Twitter coverage of Hurricane Sandy, the tornado in Oklahoma, and the Boston bombing.

Special attention is paid to the comparative analysis of lexemes used in the mass media to describe the realities of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Therefore, E. El Fallaki (2022) and A. Graef (2023) analyze propaganda in the media and political publications. M. Osnabrügge et al. (2021) examine the features of political texts in general. O. Komarnytska and M. Karpushyna (2022) analyze the lexical and grammatical features of reporting on the course of military operations. N. Roman et al. (2017) and S. Stankova (2023) describe the specifics of the formation of media discourse of information warfare in the world. M. Lorincz (2023) examines lexemes used by reputable British news outlets in describing the positions of the Ukrainian and Russian governments. As basic methods, the article uses keyword analysis, expression analysis, and lexeme analysis. Hence, the frequency of using negative and positive expressions is compared in order to describe the actions of representatives of the governments of warring countries. Descriptions of linguistic characteristics are based on the specifics of the use of certain lexical and grammatical patterns. A limitation of the study is that

“decontextualized keywords may not be self-explanatory and could potentially lead to incorrect research conclusions” (Lorincz, 2023, 120).

V. Solopova et al. (2023) carried out a lexical analysis of descriptions of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the news Telegram channels of Ukraine, Russia, France, and Romania. Their analysis is aimed both at reviewing the narrative strategies of describing the war in general, and at identifying the most used clichés of propaganda sources. While fake news forms a large proportion of the propaganda tools, propaganda also relies on a specific combination of words, appealing to emotions or stereotypes, ‘flag-waving’ and detachment techniques, such as red herrings or whataboutism (Solopova et al., 2023, 6). The material of the research is the names, terms and expressions included in the glossary of the National Security Service of Ukraine recommended for use by public figures in diplomatic affairs to describe the realities of the Russian-Ukrainian war. As a result of the analysis of the semantic content of various lexical means used to describe the war, a number of observations were made regarding the nature of their use. Fake news is characterized by an excessively emotional choice of words in order to interest the recipient. Accordingly, sentimental messages with positive and negative semantics were analysed.

Thus, N. Karpchuk and B. Yuskiv (2021) examine the main lexemes used by Russian propaganda using reports from the “Russia Today” resource as an example. The main material for the research was the titles of publications of the outlined media. First, the semantic features of the lexemes of the vocabulary corpus were reconstructed, followed by the creation of a structural thematic model of the expressions most used in propaganda, and the connotative meanings of emotionally charged lexemes were analysed to describe the war. The study is focused on the vocabulary structure of analytical materials and the thematic content of resource messages. The conclusion was made that the personalities of the Ukrainian authorities are of no importance for Russian propaganda, because both Petro Poroshenko and Volodymyr Zelenskyi are described using expressive, negatively coloured vocabulary.

Furthermore, D. Geissler et al. (2023) also conduct a quantitative analysis of Russian propaganda-related lexemes in social networks. In particular, the researchers focus on analysing

the frequency of posts in support of Russia and Ukraine in Twitter. The search for materials was carried out using popular hashtags in support of countries. The Prolific service employees classified the obtained information according to the content into “pro-Russian”, “pro-Ukrainian” or “neutral/inaccurate/irrelevant”. The Botometer (specializes in detecting bots by analysing account content) and Bot Sentinel (detects not only bots, but also trolls and curated accounts) programmes were used to identify bots (Geissler et al., 2023, 5). Miller’s research (2019) is also related to the analysis of emotional vocabulary used by Russian propaganda. For example, pro-Russian news pages, such as the so-called Internet Research Agencies deliver propaganda to the Western media space. Thus, lexemes associated with fear and anger are most often used to manipulate mass consciousness. “...It is worth noting that potentially violent language, including terms such as ‘kill’, ‘hate’, ‘attack’ and ‘protest’, is present in several themes in both thematic model results”. An illustration is the US presidential election, where a positive image was created of the candidate with a more pro-Russian position - Donald Trump, as opposed to Hilary Clinton with a democratic and pro-European course.

In the collection “Wars and Worlds” devoted to the exposure of Russian propaganda, V. Moroz also describes the informational influence of media controlled by Russia in the section “Networks of Illusions”... “Social networks have now become information channels through which authoritarian regimes like Russia export ‘hybrid warfare’ to democratic countries” (Moroz, 2017, 62). Hence, the author emphasizes that even social networks (for example, vkontakte.ru and LiveJournal), which were oppositional in nature from the beginning of their existence, become pro-government due to the persecution of the owners and the purchase of rights to the holdings of the social networks. As a method of Ukraine’s struggle against Russian propaganda, the author singles out the tactics of Internet regulation in the form of blocking the sites of the aggressor country that may contain information posing a danger to Ukrainian sovereignty.

Researcher O. Shaparenko analyses new lexical frames (abbreviation, affixation, formation of new word combinations) that arose when the hybrid war, which had been going on since 2014, grew into a full-scale one in 2022. The researcher used the methods of observation, comparative analysis, and synthesis (Shaparenko, 2022). The proposed analysis

reveals a clear connection between society and the language lexicon. The metaphorical and emotional colouring of the used lexemes also becomes important.

Moreover, A. Erlich and C. Garner (2023) investigated the degree of vulnerability of Ukrainian residents to Russian propaganda through social surveys. It was concluded that the majority of Ukrainians perceive Russian propaganda critically and are able to adequately counter it. However, it was noted that Ukrainians, who have a greater ethno-linguistic attachment to Russia, are more vulnerable to disinformation from Kremlin sources.

Methods

Research design

The materials of the research are articles from propaganda Internet resources distributed in the territories temporarily occupied by Russia, namely, Rg.Ru, Gazeta.ru, Tavria.tv, articles from the official website of the largest pro-government party in Russia - All-Russian Political Party “Единая Россия” (“United Russia”) and posts from Telegram channels of bloggers who claim about their opposition, having imperial ideas – “Котики и корона на голове Беллы Рапопорт” (“Cats and a Crown on the Head of Bella Rapoport”), “Кровавая барыня” (“Bloody Lady”), etc.

The main lexemes related to the realities of the active phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war are singled out from the titles of the texts and the texts themselves. Their emotional and lexical load is characterized, their lexical choice is justified, and their function in propaganda journalistic materials is explained. Accordingly, lexemes are categorized according to the functions performed in journalistic propaganda materials. Quotations of headlines and wording of bloggers using the outlined phrases are also provided.

Sampling

The choice of methods and materials is determined by the need for a multifaceted study of the specifics of the use of certain clichéd expressions in Russian journalistic materials of different semantic and emotional load and stylistics. The number of analysed sources and their heterogeneous nature can be explained by the need to carry out a careful analysis of their content to a greater extent than to create a larger sample of studied materials. Six separate

sources – from the official website of the United Russia party to bloggers’ records – can be explained by the need for a thorough understanding of the working mechanism of Russian propaganda in the context of an information war, not only in official pro-government propaganda materials, but also in sources that pretend to be oppositional. The selection criterion is the direct or indirect expression of positions that are completely identical or similar to the narratives formulated by the Russian authorities.

The meaning and functions of identified lexical units in Russian propaganda are analysed, in particular, when it comes to the choice of words or phrases of certain semantics among words in a synonymous series. A tendency has been observed for Russian propaganda publications to erase negative connotations associated with terrorism and the illegal occupation of territories, attributing them to the Ukrainian army because of the choice of words with a certain emotional connotation.

Methods

This study employs quantitative (selection and description of lexical units) and comparative (comparison of the nature and connotations of use and semantic meaning of lexemes used in Russian propaganda). Methods of statistical analysis were also used (the number and frequency of mention of certain lexemes were calculated). These methods include attention to lexical choice in the context of using certain words, phrases, and word combinations in order to form a certain vision of the war by its audience. Attention is focused on the meanings acquired by word combinations in certain contexts and on their emotional load, in particular, in situations when Russian propaganda tries to redefine words to denote military realities.

Ethical criteria

The research was carried out independently at each stage - from the selection of sources to the actual process of writing the text. Work on sources in the form of keyword analysis, understanding their meaning, identifying and abstracting key theses was done independently. The principle of irreplaceability of cited sources was observed during the research. The culture of referring to the studies of researchers whose articles are used in the theoretical section of the article has been observed. The contribution of

previous researchers of related issues is noted. The materials are publicly available. No infringing software, including AI, was used when writing.

Results

The choice of words to describe the activities of various military groups is indicative. Moreover, the lexemes “терористи” (“terrorists”) and “бойовики” (“militants”) are used by the pro-Russian mass media in the temporarily occupied territories to refer to the armed forces, in the context of fake news, which demonstrates the desire to establish a negative image of the Ukrainian army in direct contrast to the term “військові” (“the military”) which characterizes members of the Russian occupation army. Sometimes, juxtaposition of these two terms is observed in one sentence of the title: “Более 80 боевиков ВСУ ликвидировали военные группировки «Днепр»” (“The Dnipro military group liquidated more than 80 militants of the Armed Forces of the Ukraine”), “На Херсонском направлении военные РФ ликвидировали место скопления живой силы и лодку ВСУ” (“In the Kherson direction, the Russian military eliminated a place of concentration of militants and a boat of the Armed Forces of Ukraine”), “За сутки военные РФ ликвидировали более 35 боевиков ВСУ” (“In a day, the Russian military liquidated more than 35 militants of the Armed Forces of Ukraine”) (Tavria, 2023). In addition, they try to impose the idea of the illegitimacy of the Ukrainian army with the use of word “militants” in order to reinforce the narrative about Ukraine as a whole as a failed state, which favourably coincides with the rhetoric of Russian propaganda about the need to merge the territories of Ukraine and Belarus with Russia. It is also interesting that the lexeme “military” in propaganda news has several meanings:

1. Part of the lexemes “військові кореспонденти” (“military correspondents”) and “військові слідчі” (“military investigators”), which should legitimize the actions of the legal bodies of the occupation administration;
2. “Військові” (“The military”) in reference to members of the occupying army.

The juxtaposition of the terms “Ukrainian language” and “Russian language” is relevant, as it is the use of the Russian language in the East and South of Ukraine that Russian propaganda tries to use to legitimize armed aggression and

occupation. Therefore, the juxtaposition of the Ukrainian and Russian languages in the news headlines of the media under the occupation authorities is mentioned in the context of portraying the Ukrainian legislation on the de-Russification and the need to use the state language in public places in a negative light — as a violation of the right to self-identification of a person. “Военных ВСУ отправят на курсы украинского языка” (“The military of the Armed Forces of Ukraine will be sent to Ukrainian language courses”), “Рогов: В подконтрольном Киеву Запорожье меняют вывески на русском языке” (“Rogov: they change signs in Russian in Kyiv-controlled Zaporizhzhia”) (Rg.Ru, 2024). Besides, examples of statements by Ukrainian media persons regarding the need to use the Ukrainian language are used in a distorted light.

“Экс-депутат Рады Фарион похвасталась ненавистью внучки к русскоговорящим” (“I. Farion, Ex-deputy of the Verkhovna Rada boasted of her granddaughter’s hatred of Russian speakers”) (Rg.Ru, 2024). News related to the Russian language is also aimed at the fulfilment of such opposite tasks of the propagandists, as the demonstration of measures to spread the Russian language in states whose authorities supported the aggressor country: “Студенты из Китая практикуют свой русский в детском саду” (“Students from China practice Russian in kindergarten”), “Власти провинции КНР Ляонин: Русский в вузах региона изучают 4 тысячи студентов” (“Liaoning Provincial authorities in People’s Republic of China: 4 thousand students are studying Russian in regional universities”) (Rg.Ru, 2024), on the one hand, while showing how the Russian language is supposedly being repressed in Ukraine and in the Western countries of the world, on the other. In addition to Ukrainian language legislation, the legislation of the Baltic countries is criticized regarding the need for migrants to learn the state languages of their countries of residence. “Минобразования Литвы считает правильным отказ от русского языка как иностранного” (“The Ministry of Education of Lithuania considers it correct to abandon the Russian language as foreign”) (Rg.Ru, 2024).

Such a contextual choice is an attempt to justify Russia’s colonial expansion of territories under the pretext of the propaganda task of “protecting the Russian-speaking population of other regions” from pretended oppression. Attempts to describe the actions of countries that support the aggression of the Putin government in a complimentary tone are also observed in the use

of the phrase ‘national minorities’, because the main context in which this idiom is used in the propaganda media is the statement about the concern of Russia and its allies for the rights of national minorities. “Венгрия и Румыния добились от Украины улучшения прав национальностей” (“Hungary and Romania helped Ukraine improve the rights of national minorities”) (Gazeta.ru, 2023).

An important place in Russian propaganda is the manipulation of the religious preferences of believers to promote Kremlin narratives. The Russian Orthodox Church (ROCh), which has long been performing the functions of not so much uniting the community of believers as delivering propaganda messages, is mentioned in the Russian mass media in three main contexts:

1. Criticism of the actions of the Ukrainian authorities: “Раскольники избили прихожанина про захвате храма УПЦ на Украине” (“Dissidents beat a parishioner about the capture of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine”), “Зеленский потребовал у Рады принять закон о запрете деятельности УПЦ” (“Zelenskyi demanded that the Council adopt a law on the prohibition of the activities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church”) (Gazeta.ru, 2023);
2. Support for Russian military aggression: “Патриарх доказал допустимость причащения бойцов СВО на историческом примере” (“Patriarch proved the possibility of communion with soldiers involved in a special military operation using a historical example”) (Gazeta.ru, 2023).
3. Criticism of Western inclusion and its opposition to “духовных скреп” (“spiritual bonds”): “Глава РПЦ призвал пустить священников на консультации перед абортom” (“The head of the Russian Orthodox Church called on priests to consult before abortion”), “Российские католики выступили против декларации Ватикана о благословении гомосексуалов” (“Russian Catholics opposed the Vatican’s declaration on the blessing of homosexuals”) (Gazeta.ru, 2023).

The last point of our analysis is an overview of the lexical aspects of the Telegram channels of bloggers who position themselves as the Russian opposition, but demonstrate imperial narratives in their reflections on news concerning Ukraine. Thus, Bella Rapoport, a Russian feminist blogger, despite her participation in protests against the invasion of Ukraine since the

beginning of the active phase of the full-scale war, has now changed her rhetoric to one critical of both sides of the armed conflict, thereby unacceptably equating the aggressor and the victim. We observe irony over calling the Russian occupiers “orcs” (a lexeme borrowed from R.J. Tolkien’s novels), and the Ukrainian military — “elves”. So, the propaganda function of creating an “ambiguous” picture of the war for the mass media is fulfilled.

“Все эти два года не уставала повторять – отождествление Украины как государства и украинских политиков с гражданами страны, а также бездумное воспевание некоего особого эльфийского народа, не способного на коррупцию, пытки, насилие – в качестве противопоставления оркам, которые по сути своей тлетворной все такие, запрет на разговор о внутренних проблемах – это прежде всего удар по украинцам же” (“All these two years, I hadn’t got tired of repeating – the identification of Ukraine as a state and Ukrainian politicians with the citizens of the country, as well as the mindless praise of a certain elven people, incapable of corruption,

torture, violence – as a counterpoint to the Orcs, who are inherently corrupt, the ban on talking about internal problems is, first of all, a blow to Ukrainians themselves”) (Telegram, 2023). We also see manipulation in the form of speculation about the use of the Russian language by a certain part of the residents of Ukraine as creating a false impression of the common mentality of the peoples. “...Настя Травкина авторка того самого текста, где на примере трех или там четырех пар слов сравнивались украинский и русский языки на предмет того, какой один из них рабский и орочий, а другой — сильный и эльфийский” (“...Nastya Travkina is the author of the same text, where, using the example of three or four pairs of words, the Ukrainian and Russian languages were compared for which one of them is servile and orcish, and which one is strong and elfin”) (Cats and a Crown on the Head of Bella Rapoport). The use of the preposition “on” in relation to Ukraine is notable in this fragment, which is an imperial marker of treating Ukraine as a territory, not a state. We can also observe indignation at the translation of Soviet films, and accordingly – their perception as untranslatable and inviolable works (Table 1).

Table 1.
The specifics of the use of lexical units in Russian propaganda

Lexeme	Source	Number of mentions	Meaning
Militants	Rg.Ru	10,000	Negative characteristics of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, creating doubts about the legitimacy of the Ukrainian army
	Gazeta.ru	33,250	
	United Russia’s website	650	
	Cats and a Crown on the Head of Bella Rapoport	14	
	Bloody Lady	44	
Terrorists	Rg.Ru	10,000	Negative characteristics of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Ukrainian activists, and the Ukrainian authorities
	Gazeta.ru	24,258	
	United Russia’s website	1,007	
	Cats and a Crown on the Head of Bella Rapoport	63	
	Bloody Lady	118	
The military	Rg.Ru	10,000	Attach a neutral marker to the occupying forces
	Gazeta.ru	187,141	
	United Russia’s website	10,000	
	Cats and a Crown on the Head of Bella Rapoport	324	
	Bloody Lady	1,031	
Russian language	Rg.Ru	1,275	The establishment of the Russian language as the language of hegemony
	Gazeta.ru	14,264	
	United Russia’s website	1,985	
	Cats and a Crown on the Head of Bella Rapoport	67	
	Bloody Lady	57	
Ukrainian language	Rg.Ru	280	Criticism of Ukrainian language policy, colonialist claims in temporarily occupied territories
	Gazeta.ru	4,540	
	United Russia’s website	211	
	Cats and a Crown on the Head of Bella Rapoport	13	
	Bloody Lady	17	

National minorities	Rg.Ru	78	Creation of the illusion of protection of national minorities in the Russian Federation
	Gazeta.ru	2,971	
	United Russia's website	94	
	Cats and a Crown on the Head of Bella Rapoport	1	
	Bloody Lady	3	
New regions	Rg.Ru	5,998	Attachment of a neutral meaning to an act of the occupation of territories
	Gazeta.ru	38,317	
	United Russia's website	10,000	
	Cats and a Crown on the Head of Bella Rapoport	22	
	Bloody Lady	197	
Liberated territories	Rg.Ru	174	Attachment of a positive meaning to an act of the occupation of territories
	Gazeta.ru	5,142	
	United Russia's website	1,297	
	Cats and a Crown on the Head of Bella Rapoport	3	
	Bloody Lady	11	
The Armed Forces of Ukraine	Rg.Ru	7,633	Discrediting the Ukrainian army
	Gazeta.ru	30,730	
	United Russia's website	192	
	Cats and a Crown on the Head of Bella Rapoport	123	
	Bloody Lady	114	

Source: created by the authors based on the results of the study

Exact number of lexical units used in certain publications or blogs were calculated by using the search window on the indicated Russian propaganda websites, with the exact wording of

the relevant phrases in the search queries. Table 2 presents a generalization of the use of lexical choice in Russian propaganda.

Table 2.
The use of lexical choice in Russian propaganda

Reception	Example	Analysis
Euphemisms and misinformation	“Special military operation” instead of “war”	Conceals the true nature of the invasion, minimizes its scale and brutality.
Euphemisms and misinformation	“Victims of provocations” or “collateral losses” instead of “civilian victims”	Downplays the significance of the deaths of civilians, blames them for their own deaths.
Emotionally charged vocabulary	“Fascists”, “Banderivites”, “Nazis” about Ukrainians	Devalues Ukrainians, demonizes them, justifies aggression.
Emotionally charged vocabulary	“The Suffering of the Russian People”	Causes sympathy, mobilizes support for the actions of the authorities.
Repetition and slogans	“Ours for ours”, “Russia is us”, “Let's protect Donbas”	Simple, memorable slogans that convey messages clearly.
Hate speech	Offensive words and phrases about Ukrainians, LGBT, ethnic minorities	Inflames enmity, splits society.
Historical myths and falsifications	“Russia has always sought to protect the Slavic peoples”	Manipulation of historical facts, mythologizing of the past.
Historical myths and falsifications	“The Ukrainian state has no historical right to exist”	Denial of Ukrainians' right to self-determination.

Source: created by the authors based on the results of the study

Analysing Table 2, it is essential to note that these are only a few examples. Russian propaganda uses a wide range of lexical techniques, which are constantly changing and improving. The ability to recognize and analyse these techniques is of great importance in order to resist them and protect oneself from their harmful influence.

The analysed material gives grounds to conclude about the attempts of Russian propaganda to change the semantics of terms to describe the realities of the Russian-Ukrainian war with the help of a certain lexical choice. We observe how the selection of certain signifiers from the synonymous series performs the function of manipulating consciousness and justifying military aggression.

Discussion

As a result of the application of the described methodology, the main lexemes used by Russian publicists and bloggers to denote the realities of war in order to change the focus of potential propaganda addressees, mostly – the population of the occupied territories, were calculated and analysed by lexical meaning. The selected language means were analysed according to the frequency of use and functional load in propaganda materials. This study can contribute to further consideration of the main mechanisms of propaganda language based on the choice of certain tokens as means of expression. The research could potentially be an interesting opportunity to get acquainted with the analysis of the functions most often performed by certain lexemes in Russian propaganda, as well as with the specifics of the redefinition of terminology related to the description of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Like previous lexical studies, the article focuses on the semantic and pragmatic functions of using certain phrases and sentences in propaganda materials. The difference from previous works is the greater variety of analysed materials – from pro-government news websites to opposition resources.

A theoretical study by Ash et al. (2021) contains a general analysis of the influence of lexical choice on the semantics of the text. Their analysis is statistical and focuses on the evaluation of the frequency of use of certain lexical units in propaganda texts. The group of scientists E. Ash, G. Gauthier, and Widmer, P. (2021) and E. Ash and E. Labzina (2019) also analyse the use of emotionally charged vocabulary in political discourse, which is similar to the issue analysed in this article. As in our study, R. Abbadi et al. (2024) conducted a comparative analysis of the speeches of the presidents of the United States, Ukraine, and Russia during the war.

In the study of H. Siuta (2022), statistical analysis plays a similarly important role, as the author focuses on the lexical and phraseological means of the conscious choice of the Ukrainian language by the majority of the population of Ukraine as the main language of communication with the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Moreover, the researcher analyses modern Ukrainian political speeches (Siuta, 2019). The political peculiarities of the linguistic choice of residents of the frontline areas are analyzed by G. Hentschel and O. Palinska (2022).

Similar to the content of our study, O. Kononenko focuses on lexical changes that occurred as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war. However, unlike the outlined article, the material for its research is the change in the lexical composition in the Ukrainian language, in particular, the appearance of neologisms, lexemes-indicators, etc. so-called the “linguistic shield” formed by key words that help to identify the language of the occupiers (Kononenko, 2023). The emergence of sovereignisms and other types of Internet neologisms during the Russian-Ukrainian war is analyzed by V. Zaskaleta et al. (2023) and O. Horkusha (2023). In addition, N. Kramar (2023), A. Tkach and M. Tkach (2023) examine modern Internet slang.

D. Racek et al. (2023; 2024) also perform a statistical analysis, studying the change in language behaviour and language choice of Ukrainians since the beginning of the full-scale war using the material of Twitter posts. A. Halich et al. (2023) also investigate the specifics of Internet communication during the Russian-Ukrainian war. O. Kravchenko and N. Fedotova (2022) also study the lexemes that denote the realities of war, furthermore, in the form of enrichment of Internet folklore, analysing language games in the era of actualization of the contrast between “own” and “other”. The researchers also analyse how demonic images are transformed in modern Ukrainian folklore in connection with the war (Kravchenko et al., 2022).

I. Bozhko’s (2022) choice of research issue is similar to our topic, as it deals with onymic lexical units for expressing hate speech to denote the realities of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

We can also mention the study of I. Renchka (2020), where the linguistic behaviour of Ukrainians during the war is analysed by using a descriptive and comparative method based on the story *Dotsia (Daughter)* by Tamara Gorikha-Zernia. In contrast to our research, the material is a text not in a journalistic style, but a fiction. The author also has a study of changes in the semantics of lexical unities in Ukrainian economic lexicology, which is also characterized by interdisciplinarity (Renchka, 2018). S. Fiialka (2023), similarly, chooses Ukrainian war poetry as her research material. Among the interdisciplinary works, we can also single out S. Tereshchenko’s analysis of the stylistic oppositions of humorous texts during the Russian-Ukrainian war (Tereshchenko, 2022).

The reception of the Russian-Ukrainian war in folklore is studied by O. Kravchenko et al. (2022) and O. Lysenko (2023), where one can trace the disclosure of the specifics of lexemes used to denote the realities of war not only in journalistic sources (as in our study) but also in oral folklore.

Recommendations

In order to avoid the limitations of this academic article, it is recommended to get acquainted not only with the sources of official propaganda of the Russian mass media, but also with those that contain hidden propaganda messages. This will make it possible to better understand the role of lexical choice in written sources of Russian propaganda, to understand the requests of their target audience and to conduct a productive counter-propaganda information campaign.

Conclusions

The relevance of the work is the need to analyse the aspects of the lexical choice in Russian propaganda in order to resist the narratives imposed by the propaganda materials of the Russian pro-government mass media in the information war. The research revealed the use of certain lexical choices (euphemisms, emotionally charged vocabulary, slogans, hate speech, historical myths, and falsifications) employed in Russian propaganda. The number of lexemes used in selected journalistic sources of Russian propaganda were identified in the course of the study. They were classified according to their meaning and functions performed in propaganda materials, moreover, in the temporarily occupied territories. The number of lexical units used in Russian propaganda to denote the realities of war was statistically calculated. The outlined results are graphically presented in the form of a table. The analysed pro-Russian mass media most often use the phrase “the military” (to denote the occupying forces) (208,496 lex. units), “new regions”, “militants” (43,928), negative characteristics of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (38,792), “terrorists” (35,446) etc. The results of the study will contribute to a better understanding of the propaganda mechanisms of the Russian propaganda media. They can be used in further lexical, sociolinguistic, and political studies on the linguistic deconstruction of imperial narratives. Research prospects. Further research may focus on deepening the statistical analysis of lexemes used by Russian propaganda, with the addition of the method of field research in the form of anonymous questionnaire surveys, among others. The lexical idioms that are created

in the occupied territories to indicate the realities of war can also be studied.

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