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SEMANTIC COLOURING OF THE WAR TERMINOLOGY IN THE EUROPEAN MASS MEDIA (Based on English, German, and Ukrainian Languages)

Research into the semantic field of 'war' is one of the current focuses of modern linguistics, due to its central importance in today's Ukrainian and global linguistic space, its influence on social consciousness, and the need for a deeper understanding of how language shapes our perception of war. Russia's war against Ukraine has made the term 'war' one of the key concepts in current public discourse. This word is actively used in the media, in political speeches, in fiction and in everyday language, thus shaping a certain worldview.

The war in Ukraine is an impetus for the creation of certain semantic units to describe new phenomena. The widespread media coverage of events in Ukraine in the mass media, both within the country and abroad, requires particularly careful use of war terminology in order to avoid misinterpretations of events and phenomena. It is therefore important not only to specify Ukrainian terminology for describing war phenomena, but also to compare it with existing terms in other languages.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine triggered the creation and use of certain semantic units that carry a negative connotation, are used in specific contexts, and reflect the international community's extremely negative attitude towards the aggressor's actions. In the future, further research in this area will examine the emergence and development of semantic units during the war in Ukraine.

Keywords: semantic field, semantic unity, negative connotation, public discourse, war of aggression.

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СЕМАНТИЧНЕ ЗАБАРВЛЕННЯ ТЕРМІНОЛОГІЇ ВІЙНИ В УКРАЇНІ У ЗАСОБАХ МАСОВОЇ ІНФОРМАЦІЇ (на матеріалі англійської, німецької та української мов)

Дослідження семантичного поля поняття «війна» є одним із актуальних напрямків сучасної лінгвістики, зважаючи на його центральне значення в сучасному українському та світовому мовному просторі, вплив на суспільну свідомість та необхідність глибокого розуміння того, як мова формує наше сприйняття війни. Війна Росії проти України зробила термін «війна» одним із ключових понять у сучасному публічному дискурсі, оскільки він активно використовується в ЗМІ, політичних промовах, художній літературі та повсякденній мові, формуючи таким чином певний світогляд.

Війна в Україні є поштовхом до створення певних семантичних одиниць для опису нових явищ. Широке висвітлення подій в Україні в засобах масової інформації, як всередині країни, так і за її межами, вимагає особливо обережного використання військової термінології, щоб уникнути неправильного тлумачення подій і явищ. Тому важливо не тільки уточнити українську термінологію для опису військових явищ, а й порівняти її з існуючими термінами в інших мовах.

Агресивна війна Росії проти України спричинила створення та використання певних семантичних одиниць, які мають негативне забарвлення, використовуються в конкретних контекстах і відображають вкрай негативне ставлення міжнародної спільноти до дій агресора. У майбутньому подальші дослідження в цій галузі будуть присвячені вивченню виникнення та розвитку семантичних одиниць під час війни в Україні.

Ключові слова: семантичне поле, семантична єдність, негативна конотація, публічний дискурс, агресивна війна.

Research into the semantic field of 'war' is one of the current focuses of modern linguistics, due to its central importance in today's Ukrainian and global linguistic space, its influence on social consciousness, and the need for a deeper understanding of how language shapes our perception of war. Russia's war against Ukraine has made the term 'war' one of the key concepts in current public discourse. This word is actively used in the media, in political speeches, in fiction and in everyday language, thus shaping a certain worldview.

The study of the semantic field of 'war' makes it possible to:



- track how the meaning and connotations of this word and related lexemes change in different historical and cultural contexts;
- identify the key concepts that shape the linguistic representation of war (e.g. struggle, defense, aggression, victory, sacrifice, heroism);

- examine the mechanisms of metaphorization (war as disease, force of nature, game, path, etc.).

Like all other historical events, the war in Ukraine is an impetus for the creation of certain semantic units to describe new phenomena. The widespread media coverage of events in Ukraine in the mass media, both within the country and abroad, requires particularly careful use of war terminology in order to avoid misinterpretations of events and phenomena. It is therefore important not only to specify Ukrainian terminology for describing war phenomena, but also to compare it with existing terms in other languages.

The concept of 'semantic unity' was borrowed from the field of natural language processing. It indicates that certain words or phrases can be coordinated in terms of meaning or topic within a specific context. Effective use of semantic units helps to understand the essence of a text or statement, facilitating the process of speech processing and interpretation. Semantic units are notable for their role in explaining idiomatic expressions and linguistic constructions, which are key to understanding the complexities of human communication (Duda: 310).

The **aim of the research** is to conceptualize and describe the terminology of the semantic field 'war' in European media reports (news reports, live updates, analytical reports) in English, German and Ukrainian; to identify common and different conceptual and evaluative patterns between the languages.

The **object** of the research is the semantic field of 'war' in news reports from leading European and North American publications (online versions). Based on material from English, German and Ukrainian, the research examines the specific features of lexical-semantic content, communication strategies and cultural values.

Various **methods** are used to study semantic units, aimed at analyzing and interpreting linguistic phenomena. The methodologies highlighted in recent studies demonstrate a wide range of approaches from cognitive linguistics and corpus linguistics to semiotic analysis. In the course of our research, we used a comparative-typological method to study the corpus of texts and identify patterns in the functioning of semantic unities, a comparative analysis method, a component analysis method, a semantic analysis method and a systematic-functional analysis of discourse (SFAD) method. The research was conducted at an interdisciplinary level, which is appropriate from the point of view of its effectiveness.

The semantic field is regarded as a system of lexemes linked by a common concept (A. Wierzbicka: 33). In this study, it encompasses words associated with war as a social and political phenomenon. Conceptualization is understood as the process of representing and structuring reality through language (J. Lakoff, M. Johnson: 106).

The semantic field of 'war' reflects collective experiences, national values and historical memory. Its analysis helps to understand how society interprets war events, shapes the image of "them" and "us" and defines the concepts of patriotism and freedom. Such research is important for the creation of educational and cultural projects aimed at preserving historical memory and combating manipulative practices in information warfare.

The semantic field of 'war' comprises the following interconnected subfields: warfare (means and methods of warfare), weapons (use of prohibited means such as chemical or bacteriological weapons), parties (combatants and civilians, their status and protection), space/time (conflict zone, duration of the conflict), consequences (effects on the civilian population, destruction), law/politics (international humanitarian law, rules of warfare, state policy) and the humanitarian dimension (protection of war victims, provision of aid, humanitarian principles such as the principle of distinction).

In cognitive linguistics (Lakoff, Johnson, Maslova, et al.), the semantic field of 'war' is often organized by a series of conceptual frames/metaphors. If we focus on those mentioned by them (game/sport, disease/virus, force of nature/disaster, machine/technology, morality/law), this can be described as follows:

1. War as a game/sport. Typical metaphors include: 'Battle is a match', 'the enemy is an opponent', 'winning the war', 'tactics/strategy of the game'. The concept dominates military rhetoric (e.g. 'forward play', 'defensive position') and serves to rationalize violence, presenting war as a competition with clear rules and outcomes.

2. The concept of 'war as disease/virus' can be described by the following typical metaphors: 'war epidemic', 'war is spreading', 'cleansing society of the enemy'. It conveys a sense of uncontrollability, rapid spread, the need for "treatment" or 'immunity'. The function of the concept is to create emotional dramatization, emphasizing suffering and destruction.

3. The concept of 'war as a force of nature/catastrophe' encompasses typical metaphors such as 'storm of war,' 'fire of battle,' and 'the earth burning beneath our feet.' Here, war is perceived as something uncontrollable, all-consuming, almost 'natural.' The function of this concept is to relieve certain actors of their responsibility ('it is a disaster that simply happened').

4. War as machine / technology. Typical metaphors: 'war machine,' 'mechanism of war,' 'starting the war machine.' Function: emphasizes order and power, sometimes also heartlessness.

5. War as morality/law. Typical metaphors: 'just war', 'crimes against humanity', 'punishment of the enemy'. The focus is on legitimacy, guilt and punishment. Function: ethical justification of participation or condemnation.

A comparative analysis shows that English-language media tend towards neutrality and metaphorization, German-language media towards legalization and formal accuracy, and Ukrainian media towards emotionality and patriotic overtones. Our research shows that war terminology in media discourse is not only an instrument of description, but also of shaping social narratives.

While journalism should be based on the principles of objectivity and neutrality, we believe that international journalists should not remain neutral in their assessment of current events in Ukraine. In our opinion, the most politically correct from the point of view of legal assessment of the situation in Ukraine are semantic unities with a connotative component of negative assessment that are widely used in English-language media.

According to (Pawliszko: 252) the following elements could be identified to evaluate feelings, things and the character of people: expression of emotions, judgment and appreciation. These elements refer to the emotional reactions evoked in the recipients of discourse.

1. Expression of emotions – contains an emotional component of communication that can be positive or negative. The expression of emotions can be divided into overt (description of physical manifestations of feelings) and covert (indirect manifestation).

2. Judgment – the institutionalization of feelings in the context of behavioral norms, whereas recognition is the institutionalization of feelings in the context of norms, categorizes attitudes in evaluation theory as affect and appreciation.

3. Recognition – refers to the evaluation of things, which can be positive or negative. Recognition also includes abstract concepts and semiotic entities.

Our research has shown that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has given rise to the creation and use of certain semantic unities that contain negative evaluative connotations, are used in certain contexts and reflect the sharply negative attitude of the world community to the aggressive actions of the invading country:

(1) *Russia will continue to bleed profusely*

Beat Russia the smart way

(2) *Pistorius: Mehr Menschenverachtung kaum vorstellbar*

"Dies war ein bewusst kalkulierter Angriff mit dem Ziel, maximalen Schaden für Menschen und die zivile Infrastruktur zu verursachen", schrieb Selenskyj

At present, after almost four years of full-scale war, there is a tendency to neutralize the evaluative component in characterizing the military conflict in Ukraine. At the same time, positive vocabulary continues to be used to describe the activities of the Ukrainian armed forces, the heroism of Ukrainian soldiers and the resilience of the Ukrainian people.

(3) *"...extraordinary work of the country's intelligence and special forces..."*

"...Ukraine is proving itself to be exceptionally adaptive..."

English- and German-language media covering the Ukraine conflict indicates that military resistance and Ukrainian defense are often framed with *positive or valorizing language* – e.g., *courageous resistance*, *defending sovereign territory*.

These lexical choices semantically colour Ukraine's role as *morally justified / defensive / heroic*. And contrast this with aggressive, initiating language for Russian military actions.

At the same time, leading media outlets in the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany are trying to remain neutral in their coverage of events in Ukraine. Of course, extraordinary events such as corruption scandals and government crises tend to generate negative coverage:

(4) *Misallocated resources compromise critical infrastructure, demoralize soldiers and civilians, and weaken Ukraine's credibility as it seeks to maintain international support. Western allies, already providing billions in military and financial aid, will now closely watch how decisively Kyiv confronts this corruption crisis.*

Some statements by leading politicians in the UK and Germany do contain a clearly formulated negative component directed against Russia's aggression in Ukraine:

(5) *"Das hat mit militärischen Zielen gar nichts mehr zu tun. Das ist ein reiner Terror-Krieg gegen die Zivilbevölkerung der Ukraine", sagte Merz. "Das ist unser stärkster Hebel, um Moskau an den Verhandlungstisch zu bewegen und diesen schrecklichen Krieg perspektivisch zu beenden", sagte er.*

The analysis shows that Western outlets typically use terms such as "*invasion*" / "*war*" / "*attack*" to describe Russia's actions, rather than euphemisms like "*special military operation*" (a term used in Russian official discourse). This usage explicitly frames Russia as the *initiator of aggression* rather than just a participant in conflict, carrying negative connotations and responsibility attribution.

For example, the Washington Post most frequently uses:

- "Russia's invasion of Ukraine"
- "full-scale invasion" (for events after February 24, 2022)
- "Russia-Ukraine war"
- "Kremlin's war"
- Less often: simply "the war in Ukraine".

German media texts, including Tagesschau and similar news programs, widely use clear military terminology:

"*Krieg*" (war) is the dominant term used to describe a full-scale conflict, distinguishing it from the more neutral '*Konflikt*' (conflict) or "*Militäroperation*" (military operation), which may appear in the context of diplomatic discussions.

Kampfhandlungen (combat operations), *Bombardierung* (bombing), *Front* (front line), *Verluste* (casualties), etc. are words that clearly describe the events of war.

This style is consistent with journalistic practice of conveying factual information and avoiding excessive emotionality or euphemisms when referring to direct military violence.

Research on English-language media covering the Ukraine indicates that military resistance and Ukrainian defense are often framed with *positive or valorizing language* – e.g., *courageous resistance*, *defending sovereign territory*. These lexical choices semantically colour Ukraine's role as *morally justified / defensive / heroic*. In contrast with *aggressive, initiating* language for Russian military actions.

The other semantic frames, covered by English and German mass media, include the following: conflict / aggression (*war*, *invasion*, *attack*), defense / resistance (defend, stand firm, counteroffensive, resistance), humanitarian impact (refugee, displacement, civilian casualties), geopolitical context (sanctions, NATO, international support).

Conceptual frame of "conflict as a moral struggle" is also widely reflected in English- and German- languages media. The following semantically colored vocabulary is widely used: *violation of international law*, *sovereignty*, *territorial integrity*, *war crimes*, *crimes against humanity*, *illegal annexation*, and others.

German media outlets are attempting to present the situation in a structured manner, with an emphasis on geopolitics, international reactions, and humanitarian and economic consequences.

A balance is maintained between reports on military events and their political background, including the positions of various governments, sanctions, and the reactions of the European Union. This is particularly true of public broadcasters (ARD, ZDF), which try to avoid a one-sided tone—although criticism may appear in editorials. (6)



Although many English-language media outlets strive to be neutral and factual, their texts also contain connotative and evaluative elements, especially in analytical commentaries and international reviews. For example: vocabulary that constructs an ethical dichotomy (*heroism* vs. *aggression*; *resilience* vs. *full-scale aggression*).

This not only describes the facts, but also forms a certain evaluative framework that influences public perception.

Thus, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine triggered the creation and use of certain semantic units that carry a negative connotation, are used in specific contexts and reflect the international community's extremely negative attitude towards the aggressor's actions. In the future, further research in this area will examine the emergence and development of semantic units during the war in Ukraine.

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Resources of illustrative material (in accordance to their appearance in the text):

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