

INTERPRETATION OF RELEVANT MEDIA TOPOI IN THE RUSSIAN INTERNET SPACE

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Abstract

The article examines communicative tactics and presentations of opinions, evaluations and worldview imperatives when socially significant relevant media topics are discussed in the Russian Internet space. The Internet as a network resource for organising mass communication on websites creates unique conditions both for interactive interpersonal communication between representatives of different communities of Russian society and for interactive communication between actors of media discourse and a mass audience. Such communication of respondents of electronic media publications has its own specific features of linguistic expression and argumentative-rhetorical objectification. Of particular interest are the means, methods and techniques for updating axiological and regulatory meanings in a discussion of media topoi characterised as extraordinary, i.e. political scandals, armed conflicts (internal or threatening the country's security), terrorist attacks, natural disasters, technological and environmental disasters, international sanctions, etc. The authors also analyse the linguistic dominants in interpreting the oppositions of "own — alien", "ours — not ours", the polarity of opinions and evaluations in the tonality of solidarity/distancing, support/discrediting, accusations of legitimacy/illegality, etc. In addition, the authors refine the definition of methods, techniques and forms for presenting direct or veiled evaluations, itemise the nomenclature of multilevel linguistic means of its expression, disclose the pragmatic potential of individual linguistic units and the actualisation of expression, affectability, social and subjective modality, including those with a precedent status, and confirm the role of evaluations as text-producing categories. The work involved the descriptive and analytical method as well as the methods of continuous sampling, contextual analysis and structural-componental analysis. The use of the descriptive-analytical method, which includes observation, comparison, generalisation and interpretation of the facts obtained, allowed us to have a clear idea of the linguistic topic under study, develop a description sequence as well as organise and arrange the linguistic material. Due to contextual analysis, we were able to highlight the shades of meaning in the semantic structure of multilevel pejorative linguistic means, and structural-componental analysis made it possible to consider the components of a frequency creative invective. The analysis of the actual material based on the continuous sampling method also showed that the invective tools used in the interactive discussion by the respondents are the dominant method for meaning-making, actualising the estimated meaning, strengthening the expressiveness and polarity of opinions both in general and at the level of the communicants' comment fragment.

Keywords: media topos, media discourse, communicative tactics, naming, creative invective.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Internet as a network resource for organizing mass communication on websites (forums, blogs, social networks, messengers, comments, etc.) has created unique conditions both for interactive interpersonal communication between representatives of different communities of Russian society and for interactive

communication between actors of media discourse and a mass audience. Within the framework of this mass social interaction, there occurs an expanded presentation of opinions, evaluations, worldview imperatives, which have their own specific features of linguistic expression and argumentative-rhetorical objectification, which undoubtedly causes the interest of linguistic researchers. Of particular interest are the means, methods and techniques for updating axiological and regulatory meanings in a discussion of media topoi characterised as extraordinary, i.e. political scandals, armed conflicts (internal or threatening the country's security), terrorist attacks, natural disasters, technological and environmental disasters, international sanctions, etc.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In the space of communicative interaction between the media and a mass audience, we examined the 'Syria' media topos (topos is a way of thematisation focused on speech itself). This media topos can be characterized in terms of information and content as the key polar media topic in the world political community and as resonant for a fairly large number of Russians. For the Russian audience in the interactive communication of the respondents of electronic media publications, it first of all became the dominant for interpreting such oppositions as "own — alien" and "ours — not ours", the polarity of opinions and assessments in the tonality of solidarity/distancing, support/discrediting, accusation of legitimacy/illegality, etc.

It should be noted that in a multilevel "interpretation system, which is schematically expressed by the "reality — text" dichotomy, not so much the concepts of culture as its topoi are interpreted. This is primarily due to the differences that exist between the notions of 'concept' and 'topos' and which are determined by the specific features of linguistics and rhetoric. The concept is a reflection of human verbal and cognitive activity, a cognitive notion. The topos of culture is a reflection of evaluative and comparative knowledge, the ethical and moral paradigm of the people" [Annenkova 2011: 87–88].

In addition, of particular interest for our study are the issues of defining methods, techniques and forms for presenting direct or veiled evaluations, itemising the nomenclature of multilevel linguistic means of its expression, disclosing the pragmatic potential of individual linguistic units and the actualisation of expression, affectability, social and subjective modality, including those with a precedent status, and confirming the role of evaluations as text-producing categories [Shatalova, Shatalova, 2017: 199–204]. It should be remembered that the evaluativity of any colouring has creative dynamics; it is invariant, situational, intentional, aimed at the act of forming an opinion about the object being evaluated, while this process includes not only the processing and interpretation of perceived information but also internal cognitive information based on the communicants' general background Volf 1985: 12; Dolzhikova 2017: 36; Sternin 2006: 134–145; Smetanina 2002: 5–12].

3 METHODS

In our study, we relied on an integrated approach in the analysis of discussions and comments of electronic respondents. The main research method is the descriptive-analytical method, which includes observation, comparison, generalization and interpretation of the facts. It allowed us to have a clear idea of the linguistic topic under study, develop a description sequence as well as organise and arrange the linguistic material. Due to contextual analysis, we were able to highlight the shades of meaning in the semantic structure of multilevel pejorative language means, and structural-componental analysis made it possible to consider the components of a frequency creative invective. The analysis of the actual material based on the continuous sampling method also showed that the pejorative and invective tools used in the interactive discussion by the respondents are the dominant method for meaning-making, actualising the evaluative meaning, strengthening the expressiveness and polarity of opinions ("own — alien") both in general and at the level of the communicants' comment fragment [Zavershinskaya 2004: 41–47; Parshina 2004: 85–94, Telezhko 2019:118]. The combined use of the above scientific approaches and methods makes it possible to comprehend the polarity of interpretation of relevant media topoi in the Russian Internet space by representatives of different communities of Russian society as well as interactive communication between actors of media discourse and a specific target audience.

4 TEXT

We have analysed information-analytical, political articles, blog posts of leading Russian journalists and political scientists of numerous electronic Russian and foreign media publications (Okoplanety [Eye of the Planet], militaryarms.ru, Voennoe obozrenie [Military Review], FB.ru, APN Severo-Zapad [North-West Political News Agency], Picabu, Svobodnaya pressa [Free Press], Politikus, Telegraf [Telegraph], regnum,

Zavtra [Tomorrow], etc.) and “comments” as texts of communicative activity of a mass audience for the period of 2016–2019. The subject matter of analysis in the texts of electronic publications and interactive responses is the determination of the thematic focus and addressing, typicality and presentation frequency of evaluations of the “own — alien” and “ours — not ours” microfields, the degree of intensity and nature of the tonality in evaluating information in accordance with communicative intentions and axiological attitudes of authors-journalists and their respondents [Simpson 1993, Shatalova 2018].

We noted several dominants of comprehension, interpretation and rhetorical argumentation of the provisions presented in the media text-stimulus, which had both their supporters and opponents in the interactive communication: 1) solidarity/support: «Сирия – союзник России, которому нужно помогать» [“Syria is an ally of Russia, which needs to be helped”], «Русские своих не сдают!» [“Russians do not betray their own!”], «Россия веками вписывалась за тех, кто просил о помощи, за «братушек» [“For centuries Russia has defended those who asked for help, ‘the Little Brothers’”], «Почему Алеппо называют «сирийским Сталинымградом»? [“Why is Aleppo called ‘Syrian Stalingrad’?”] 2) distancing/doubt: «Сирия — независимое государство, и Россия не должна вмешиваться» [“Syria is an independent state, and Russia should not interfere”], «Кто-нибудь хоть краем уха слышал, до начала конфликта, о том, что Сирия союзник России?» [“Has anyone ever heard, before the conflict, that Syria is an ally of Russia?”]; 3) justification: «Россия – символ восстановления мирной жизни с Сирией» [“Russia is a symbol of restoring a peaceful life in Syria”], «Россия защищает свои геополитические интересы и противостоит Америке» [“Russia defends its geopolitical interests and opposes America”], «Сирия — поле для геополитической борьбы США и России» [“Syria is a field for the geopolitical struggle between the USA and Russia”], «Армия войны всегда побеждает армию мира» — это военная максима [“The army of war always defeats the army of peace” — this is a military maxim]. «Участвуя в боевых действиях в Сирии, российские войска получают опыт, который может сделать ее сильнейшей армией мира» [“By participating in hostilities in Syria, Russian troops gain experience that can make them the strongest army in the world”]; 4) disagreement/accusation: «Россия — агрессор, который участвует в переделе собственности страны» [“Russia is an aggressor who participates in the redistribution of the country’s property”], «Участие России в сирийской войне — отвлекающий маневр от внутренних проблем страны» [“Russia’s participation in the Syrian war is a distraction from the country’s internal problems”], «Путин втягивает Россию в противостояние с арабским миром» [“Putin is drawing Russia into a confrontation with the Arab world”], «Война в Сирии, как и война на Украине, — это этическая катастрофа для России» [“The war in Syria, like the war in Ukraine, it’s an ethical catastrophe for Russia”], «Упрощенная пропагандистская конструкция, предлагаемая Кремлем» [“The simplified propaganda structure proposed by the Kremlin”], «Русские — повсюду, и они наступают ... Они вторглись в мою страну и оккупировали ее» [“Russians are everywhere, and they are advancing ... They have invaded my country and occupied it”].

The following examples of the analysis of the polarity of judgments of the Internet community provide an argumentation of the reasons for Russia’s participation in the military conflict in Syria, which is built on the model of “Russia’s geopolitical interests — friendly Syria — the West and America are enemies (including the abstract ‘world evil’)", and implemented tactics of argumentation, demonstrating almost all structural-semantic models of the logical construction of statements, are characterized in terms of language by a wide range of emotional-figurative expressiveness to convey the tension or drama of the situation, patriotic pathos, or a rationally subjective evaluation. Cf.: *Россию вышвырнули отовсюду [Russia was thrown out from everywhere]. Россия потеряла Африку — там нас нет, Россия потеряла Латинскую Америку, мы отсутствуем в Европе, нас выдавили из Азии, Средней, Ближней, с Дальнего Востока [Russia has lost Africa — there is no our presence there, Russia has lost Latin America, we do not maintain any presence in Europe, we were squeezed out of Asia, the Middle, Near and Far East]. Россию вышвырнули из самой России [Russia was thrown out of Russia itself]. Сирия — это последний плацдарм, где присутствуют российские стратегические интересы, где есть база российского флота [Syria is the last staging ground where Russian strategic interests are present, where there is a Russian naval base]. Через Сирию мы можем влиять на процессы Ближнего Востока ... Это ключевая страна, ключевой регион, вписанный в очень сложный, живой, динамичный контекст всего Ближнего Востока и мира в целом [Through Syria, we can influence the processes of the Middle East ... This is a key country, a key region, inscribed in a very complex, vibrant, dynamic context of the entire Middle East and the world as a whole]. Поэтому Россия остро заинтересована в мирной, стабильной и дружественной Сирии [Therefore, Russia is keenly interested in a peaceful, stable and friendly Syria]; Россия вынуждена сегодня стать противовесом мировому злу, словно это последний булыжник, который держит разъяренного пса на цепи, вот-вот, и он сорвется [Russia is forced today to become a counterbalance to world evil, as if it were the last cobblestone that holds an angry dog on a chain that is just about to break*

loose]; Проблема видится гораздо объемнее: в случае с Сирией слишком многое переплелось — длинная история дружественных отношений двух стран, интересы геополитические, гуманитарные (лиц с российскими паспортами там десятки тысяч) и военно-стратегические [The problem seems to be much larger: in the case of Syria, too much is intertwined, i.e. a long history of friendly relations between the two countries, geopolitical, military-strategic and humanitarian interests (there are tens of thousands of people with Russian passports there)]; Россия в Сирии вновь доказала свой высокий статус на мировой арене [In Syria, Russia has once again proved its high status on the world stage]. Запад заговорил о растущей военной мощи России, а Россия доказала, что способна бороться против террористов и без поддержки западной коалиции [The West is talking about the growing military power of Russia, and Russia has proved that it is able to fight against terrorists without the support of the Western coalition]. На политической арене — содействие российских дипломатов помогло найти консенсус между правительством Сирии и оппозицией. Задачи выполнены, а Запад вновь обведен вокруг пальца. Вашингтон и его союзники надеялись втянуть Россию в затяжной конфликт, но не вышло [In the political arena, the assistance of Russian diplomats made it possible to find consensus between the Syrian government and the opposition. The tasks are completed, and the West is again catfished. Washington and its allies hoped to drag Russia into a protracted conflict, but failed]; Сирия — «фантомная боль» Москвы по утрате бывшего влияния при опоре на «лагерь советских друзей-антиимпериалистов» в арабском мире [Syria is the “phantom pain” of Moscow due to the loss of its former influence when it relied on the “camp of Soviet anti-imperialist friends” in the Arab world]. В глазах определенной категории российского населения, особенно той, что традиционно склонна исповедовать антиамериканизм, Сирия — «последний оплот» внушительного присутствия России в регионе, «форпост противостояния Америке». [In the eyes of a certain category of the Russian population, especially the one that traditionally tends to profess anti-Americanism, Syria is the “last bastion” of Russia’s impressive presence in the region, the “outpost of confronting America”].

It should be noted that the polarity of opinions or judgments may not be so correct in its evaluations: one can observe linguistic heterogeneity, which is expressed explicitly by lexical means (i.e. direct nominations) or implicitly (connotatively-contextually), and is characterized by a wide range of associative-imaginative representations, emotionality, expressiveness, and stylistic markedness [Shatalova 2018: 375–383; karasik 2002]. For example, the rhetoric of polar statements about the current political situation in Syria and the war is often characterized by negative expression and irony. Compare, for example: Кровавая авантюра в далёкой Сирии [Bloody adventure in distant Syria]; Российский ад в Сирии [Russian hell in Syria]; Бойня у нефтяных полей Сирии [Syrian oil fields massacre]; Кто выбрал Сирию — выбрал могилу [Who chose Syria, chose the grave]; Сириада или бег на месте [Siriad or running in place]; А в Сирии — сокрушительные «успехи» [Crushing “success” in Syria]; «Оцивилизация» Сирии [“civilising” Syria]; Сирия: цирк с конями [Syria: circus with horses]; Война с терроризмом в Сирии что Битва за ясли Господни [The war on terrorism in Syria is like the battle for the Manger of the Lord]; Сирия: проект конституции от Путина [Syria: draft constitution from Putin]; Неоднозначный «путинский мир» в Сирии [The ambiguous “Putin’s peace” in Syria]; Не является ли дипломатия Москвы в сирийском конфликте «прямым вредительством экономическим интересам России»? [Is Moscow’s diplomacy in the Syrian conflict “a direct wrecking of Russia’s economic interests”?]; Почему Россия делает ставку на заведомо дохлую лошадь? [Why does Russia rely on a obviously dead horse?]; Вот и заработали хоть малую, но свою Цусиму [So we have earned, albeit small, but our own Tsushima]; Власть продолжает кормить электорат “сирийскими победами” и картинками гор нового оружия [The authorities keep on feeding the electorate with “Syrian victories” and pictures of heaps of new weapons]; В этот момент, скорее всего, на сцену выйдет Россия. Она имеет все шансы стать «миротворцем» [At this moment, most likely, Russia will enter the scene. It has every chance of becoming a “peacemaker”]; Брать города посредством авиаударов — это, конечно, кощунственно [It is of course blasphemous to take cities using airstrikes]; Оливковая ветвь. И мы имеем ввиду не символ мира. [Olive branch. But it is not the symbol of peace that we mean.]

Or, for example: Сирия живет по российскому времени [Syria lives by Russian time]; Идет абсолютно циничный, рабочий процесс отстаивания именно своих интересов [It is an absolutely cynical, working process of upholding precisely one’s own interests]; заокеанские воротилы не устают подливать керосина в пожарище [Overseas bigwigs do not get tired of pouring more fuel on the fire]; Башар Асад со своей армией не дают ястребам свергнуть человечество в пучину горя и страдания [Bashar al-Assad with his army does not allow the hawks to plunge mankind into the abyss of grief and suffering]; зверства западных выкорышек становятся общеизвестными [the atrocities of western fosterlings become well-known]; Сирия и Донбасс — «близнецы-братья» [Syria and Donbass are “twin brothers”]; Надо стоять и держать оборону [One has to stand and keep the defence]. Россия обязана просто

стоять намертво и держать Асада крепко за плечо [Russia must simply stand fast and hold Assad tightly by the shoulder]. Потому что сейчас наступает весьма непростая фаза, когда со временем обнажатся новые раны на гениталиях ястребов, которые в порыве своей ненавистной политики поставят мир в неловкое положение [Because now comes a very difficult phase when eventually new wounds will be exposed on the genitals of the hawks, who, in the fit of their hated policies, will put the world in an awkward position]; Что в итоге мы имеем в ситуации с Сирией? [So what situation do we have in Syria?] Совершенно контролируемую спецслужбами и профессиональными пропагандистами информационную картину, из которой население России не знает о давнем противостоянии шиитского меньшинства и суннитского большинства, существовании сирийской умеренной оппозиции, о том, что такое ИГИЛ и откуда он взялся [The information picture is completely controlled by the security services and professional propagandists, due to which the Russian population is not aware of the long-standing confrontation between the Shiite minority and the Sunni majority, the existence of the Syrian moderate opposition, what ISIS is and where it came from.]. Невозможно представить, чтобы россиянин, не поверив в ту чушь, которая несется с телеэкранов, вдруг задался вопросом о том, почему, к примеру, с ИГИЛ воюет афганский Талибан [It is impossible to imagine that a Russian, not believing in the rubbish that is pouring from the TV screens, suddenly wonders why, for example, the Afghan Taliban is fighting ISIS]. Или почему ИГИЛ не признает «Аль-Кауда» [Or why ISIS is not recognized by Al Qaeda]. Но природная лень россиян, воспитанная многолетней советской пропагандой, стала благодатной почвой для восстановления путинской пропаганды [But the natural laziness of Russians, brought up by many years of Soviet propaganda, has become fertile ground for the restoration of Putin's propaganda]. Кремль создал для россиян новый железный занавес, уже информационный. [The Kremlin has created for Russians a new iron curtain, this time it is informational].

The evaluative maximalism of judgments is most clearly manifested in negative nominations in relation to particular persons or their conditional opponents. Most often, they use subtle irony, puns, including precedent units or even invectives. Compare, for example, the following statements about the Russian, Syrian and American presidents: Президент Путин — несомненный патриот своей страны, который не боится отстаивать свои интересы на международной арене. Он — откровенный, прямой человек, и на этой основе с ним можно обсуждать и решать любые вопросы...глубокий, осведомленный и дружественный партнер [President Putin is undoubtedly a patriot of his country, who is not afraid to defend his interests in the international arena. He is a frank, direct person, and in this view you can discuss and solve any issues with him ... a deep, knowledgeable and friendly partner]; солнцеликий [sun-faced]; Путин — временный император Сирии [Putin is the interim emperor of Syria]; Путин — друг угнетенных народов, «российский сфинкс» [Putin is a friend of the oppressed peoples, the "Russian Sphinx"]; Нашего Асада не отдадим американцам! [We will not give our Assad to the Americans!]; не Асадом единым [not by Assad alone]; железный кулак Асада, правительство тирана Асада [Assad's iron fist; Assad's tyrant's government]; Россия пляшет под дудку Асада? [Russia dancing to Assad's pipe?]; ракетная гора Трампа в Сирии родила мышь [Trump's rocket mount in Syria gave birth to a mouse].

Even more such examples are encountered in appeals to the opponents. In the vast majority of cases, evaluations are realised by: 1) conceptual metaphors, e.g. наши прорицатели либерального толка [our liberal-minded soothsayers]; троянские кони левой оппозиции [Trojan horses of the left opposition]; интернет-бойцы «фабрики мысли» [Internet fighters of the "think tank"]; звездно-полосатая рука, которая не один год кормила террористов [a star-striped hand that has fed terrorists for years]; бедный доверчивый и прямодушный запад, его обманул Кремль [poor naive and open-minded West deceived by the Kremlin]; под завесой кремлевского «театра кукол» [under the curtain of the Kremlin "puppet theater"]; заволновался пригожинский сливной бачок — так называемое «федеральное агентство» [the Prigozhin's flushing tank (the so-called "federal agency") became agitated]; 2) multilevel pejorative means, e.g. звездно-полосатые ястребы [star-striped hawks]; полуофициозные попугаи [semi-official parrots]; заявления «придворных попок» [statements of the "court polities"]; карманные террористы [pocket terrorists]; Ура-пропагандоны [Hurrah-propagandons]; путиноиды [Putinoids]; кургузнята [Kurginyata]; патриотические пропагандявки [patriotic propagandyavkas]; пожиратели дерьма Соловьева [Solovyov's shit eaters]; бредовые выступления путинистов [delirious speeches of Putinists]; разноцветные пропагандисты Путина [Putin's multi-colored propagandists]; патриотические завывания [patriotic howls]; примитивная пропагандистская «залипуха» Евроньюс [Euronews primitive "sticky" propaganda]; бравадные словеса своры российских политологов [bravura words of a gang of Russian political scientists]; упертые путинские холуи [Putin's stubborn lackeys]; кремлевские холопы [Kremlin slaves]; любимец кремляди [Kreml'yad's favourite]; Фантаст-халтурщик, Юра, да ты офигел совсем [You slouch dreamer, Yura, are you fucking of your mind?]; наши

официальные военные и «ихтамнеты» [our defence officials and “not-there-no-hows”]; 3) irony, e.g. *Кроме вакуума в сознание жителей России лезут всяческие «историки», которые с подачи Путина начинают объяснять, что Сирия – чуть ли не прародина христианства, что оттуда снизошла благодать для России, хотя только несведущему не понятно, что сирийское христианство к российскому современному мракобесию не имеет никакого отношения [In addition to the vacuum, the consciousness of Russians is penetrated by all sorts of “historians”, who, at the suggestion of Putin, begin to explain that Syria is almost the ancestral home of Christianity, from where grace descended for Russia, although only the ignorant will not understand that Syrian Christianity has nothing to do with modern Russian obscurantism].*

5 CONCLUSIONS

Thus, using the ‘Syria’ media topos as an example, we can state that the semantic-cognitive field of interactive communication between the Russian and world Internet communities represents a paradigm of mental polarity of opinions, which is built in accordance with the actualisation of the most important classifying cultural category of “own — alien”; being one of the main dominants of the national attitude, it is important for analysing the formation and interpretation of the world image as a way of communication. This tendency is reflected in the linguistic consciousness of the Russian people and is manifested in the addressee’s evaluative maximalism in the media text, associated with the rejection of an alien point of view and its denial, and sometimes discrediting of the opponent. Interactive communication in the aggregate of its statements acts as self-consciousness of the culture of different social groups and a kind of communicative reference point of addressees.

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