

LEXICAL CODE OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH MEDIA TEXTS

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Summary

The article presents the in-depth study of the lexical code of contemporary English-language media texts as a system of verbal means that represent the key concepts of contemporary social discourse – “freedom,” “innovation,” “identity” and “crisis.” It analyses the formation and functioning specifics of the lexical code as a cognitive discursive mechanism for social, cultural and ideological meaning representation. The findings demonstrate that the vocabulary of modern English-language media not only reflects social processes, but also actively influences their interpretation, setting certain cognitive and emotional frameworks for information processing. The methodological basis of the study is a combination of cognitive-discursive, contextual-semantic, pragma– linguistic and content-analysis methods. The inquiry is based on the texts from British, French and American media outlets: BBC, The Guardian, The New York Times, CNN, etc. The research explored the lexical-semantic strategies employed to articulate the key concepts and described the manipulative potential of lexical selection in determining the ideological stance of media texts. The aim of the article is to investigate the lexical code of contemporary English-language media discourse as a multi-level system within which lexical units, emotionally colored vocabulary and lexical stylistic devices, neologisms and expressive means perform cognitive-conceptual, evaluative and manipulative functions. It was determined that the concepts of “freedom”, “innovation” and “identity” structure the media picture of the world, shaping social value orientations and affecting ideological priorities.

Key words: media discourse, concept, cognitive-discursive approach, semantic analysis, manipulative potential, identity, innovation, freedom.

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1. Introduction

Contemporary English-language media discourse is one of the most powerful tools for shaping public opinion, since it is through the language of mass media that events are interpreted, images of reality are created and certain value orientations are imposed. The vocabulary of media texts not only reflects social processes, but also actively influences their perception, setting the cognitive and emotional framework for information processing and interpretation. Therefore, the relevance of the present research lies in the fact that the English-language media discourse is constantly expanding and becoming the main source of information for the global audience. In this regard, the study of the lexical code, which reflects the mental, cultural and ideological parameters of modern society, is of particular significance.

The scientific novelty of the work lies in its comprehensive examination of the lexical code of contemporary English-language media texts as a system of verbal means that embody the dominant concepts of the modern era (freedom, crisis, innovation, identity), with regard to their cognitive and discursive potential.

Definition of the article objectives and specification of the research tasks. The aim of the study is to determine the features of the formation and functioning of the lexical code in contemporary English-language media texts. Particular attention is paid the definition of the concept of "lexical code" in the context of media discourse and the analysis of the main concepts, objectified in English-language media texts. To achieve the set goal, the study provides for the implementation of several interrelated analytical steps. In particular, it is necessary to identify the lexical and semantic means of implementing the concepts under study and characterize the manipulative potential of specific lexical choices in the media.

2. Materials and methods

The research methodology is based on a combination of discursive, cognitive-semantic, contextual and content analysis of media texts from British, French, and American publications (BBC, The Guardian, The New York Times, CNN, Reuters). In addition, the method of conceptual analysis was applied to determine the semantic content of key concepts, as well as elements of pragmatic linguistic analysis to clarify the communicative effect of lexical choice.

As a result of the analysis, it is planned to synthesize the existing approaches, summarize the findings regarding their practical applicability and conditions for effective application, as well as outline existing challenges and highlight potential directions for further research in this area.

3. Results and discussion

Lexical code as a reflection of the concept of modern media discourse

In modern linguistics it is believe that information processing is affected by such factors as subject-logical and connotative semantics, precedent phenomena and cultural background. All of these features are reflected in one of the basic concepts of linguistic and cultural competence, namely the linguistic cultural plane of the system of linguistic signs (the code).

The code is defined as a system of signs (symbols) and rules for transmitting information that has ethnic, socio-cultural or sub-cultural specificity. Scholars identify it as the means of systematization, organization and evaluation of objects and phenomena of reality, as well as one of the basic semiotic categories. According to the theory of linguistic relativity (E. Sapir and B. Whorf), codes influence the thinking and behavior of speakers of a particular language. Codes reflect person's environment and his/her consciousness and subconsciousness.

It should be noted that a particular linguistic and cultural code as a means of accumulating and transmitting culturally significant information about the universe in a condensed linguistic sign form does not cover the entire picture of the world, but only its certain fragment. The code is correlated with specific impressions, feelings and experiences, archetypal human ideas and therefore forms a coordinate system that implements cultural standards in texts.

The term "lexical code" is used to refer to a system of linguistic units that represent the value, emotional and cognitive orientations of a certain cultural community. Within the framework of media discourse, it operates as a "linguistic matrix" through which information is presented, structured and evaluated.

Contemporary English-speaking media is characterized by the manifestation of concepts that mirror global social processes: crisis, freedom, innovation, identity, truth. Each of them has its own set of linguistic representatives that form a specific lexical and semantic paradigm.

For example, the concept of "crisis" is verbalized through the lexemes *turmoil, instability, breakdown, emergency, threat*. Their use in headlines such as "Gaza's humanitarian crisis deepens" (BBC News), "The next big financial crisis may be brewing" (The Guardian), creates an image of uncertainty, anxiety and the need for immediate action. Their use in headlines such as "Gaza's humanitarian crisis deepens" (BBC News), "The next big financial crisis may be brewing" (The Guardian), creates an image of uncertainty, anxiety and the need for immediate action.

S. Onishchuk, a Ukrainian scholar, examined the concept of "Guerre" ("war" in Ukrainian) in French media. The study showed that the lexicographic analysis is an integral part of concept research in linguistic studies, particularly in the construction of frames. Since dictionaries reflect the most systematic and formalized information about word semantics, their analysis allows not only to record lexical variations, but also to determine which conceptual components are defined as central or as peripheral ones within a specific lexical field. The lexicographic analysis enables the identification of the evolution of the word meaning recorded in various dictionaries, as well as to determine the changes that occur in the meanings of terms under the influence of historical, cultural and social factors (Onishchuk, 2024: 50–51). The abovementioned concept was studied in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, with the thorough analysis of quotes from modern media discourse. In the quote by Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the metaphorical expression "lemalabsolu" is applied to refer to the aggressor, i.e., Russia, which is the enemy of Ukraine. Denotatively, the expression "lemalabsolu" indicates the concept of all-encompassing, uncontrolled evil that has no limits or compromises, which corresponds to traditional perception of an enemy in war, – source of an unconditional threat to the other side. From the point of view of connotation, the metaphor actualizes not only the physical threat, but also the moral one, demonizing the enemy as a source of destruction, which is reinforced by the term "génocide" in the context of accusations. Thus, the use of such units is not only a linguistic strategy, but also an important element of the cognitive map, which shapes the perception of war as a confrontation between two polar forces, one of which is absolute evil, while the other is a heroic victim defending its territorial integrity and moral values (Onishchuk, 2024: 53).

It should be noted that the translation of foreign media texts into Ukrainian is a challenging task as it requires not only the knowledge of source and target languages, but also the understanding of the specifics of the genre, audience and context. It is essential to attempt to reproduce not only the semantics, but also the emotional charge of media texts to ensure their effectiveness and adaptation to the Ukrainian reader. It was also determined that the successful translation of media texts requires the translator to be able to choose appropriate units that convey not only the lexical aspect, but also the stylistic nuances of the original text. The key factors of effective translation are the focus on cultural attributes and language adaptation to the perception of the Ukrainian audience (Shpota, 2023: 50).

Hence, the media not only inform, but also construct a picture of the world, dominated by a sense of instability. In this context, lexical code becomes a cognitive tool for social experience configuration.

Linguistic implementation of key concepts in media texts

In the modern world, every individual inevitably encounters a powerful flow of information. Undoubtedly, we obtain most of the facts and knowledge about the world through the media, since it is the media that participate in shaping a special individual picture of the world and are "the instruments of power and tools for implementing information dictatorship" (Timothy Nguyen, 2011).

In contemporary English-language media discourse, concepts function as semantic dominants through which the perception of reality is constructed. Their linguistic implementation is through the application of various lexical units, stylistic devices and expressive means – words, phrases, metaphors, epithets, etc, nominations that form lexical and semantic fields. Among the most representative concepts of the contemporary media discourse are “freedom”, “innovation” and “identity”, each having its own lexical paradigm that reflects the value orientations of the society.

The concept of “freedom” is key for the Western communicative space, since it is associated with basic democratic principles and human rights. Its linguistic realization in media texts is by means of the lexemes: *freedom, liberty, rights, independence*, as well as verbs with active semantic coloring – *to defend, to protect, to uphold, to fight for*. For example, headlines like “*What is the alliance defending freedom*” (The New York Times) or “*Freedom of speech: the cornerstone of free society*” (Cornell Review) demonstrate that freedom is conceptualized as a dynamic value that must be defended. Such vocabulary has a positive connotation, appeals to social unity and creates in the audience a sense of involvement in the struggle for common ideals. As noted in the article “Lexical Choice and Critical Discourse Analysis of Language Bias in Media”, the choice of words in the media is never neutral – it reflects the author’s position and establishes an ideological framework within which the event is interpreted (Das, 2011).

Another significant concept “innovation” functions as a linguistic marker of the current stage of civilization development, which is grounded in global technological advancement. In media texts, this concept is articulated through the lexemes: “*innovation*”, “*breakthrough*”, “*revolutionize*”, “*transform*”, “*next-gen*”, “*future*”, “*progress*”, “*invest*”. Metaphorical expressions such as “*AI revolutionizes healthcare systems*” (Direct Industry Emag) or “*Green innovation reshapes future cities*” create in the reader the image of global progress, world transformation and continuous development. Verbs such as “*revolutionizes*”, “*reshapes*”, “*transforms*” act as linguistic indicators of change and outline a positively marked discourse of the future. According to the study “English Media Discourse of the Early 21st Century: Lexical Innovations”, novel topics in the media are characterized by a high frequency usage of neologisms and metaphors, which serve to stimulate the imagination and shape an optimistic view of the world (Boyko, 2023). Thus, the concept of innovation is verbalized through the vocabulary of dynamics, modernization and technological breakthrough, reflecting the craving of modern society for renewal.

The concept of “identity” assumes a central role in contemporary media discourse, since it is through it that the processes of social and cultural self-identification are understood. In mass media texts, it is constructed through the lexical units: “*identity*”, “*diversity*”, “*inclusion*”, “*belonging*”, “*equality*”, “*gender identity*”, “*cultural heritage*”. The study “*Language, Power, and Identity in Media Discourse*” emphasizes that language in the media serves as a means of constructing social identity and defining the boundaries between “one’s own” and “others” (Krishna, Prasad, 2025). Thus, the concept of “identity” is linguistically objectified through the positively colored vocabulary of tolerance, but at the same time it can acquire the tone of conflict when combined with the concept of crisis – in the expressions such as “*identity crisis*”, “*identity politics*”, which emphasize the complexity of modern identification processes.

Manipulative potential of lexical choice in the media

One of the key characteristics of contemporary media discourse is its manipulative potential, conveyed primarily through the lexical units. Media language possesses the capacity not only to describe reality, but also to shape it, controlling the interpretative framework of perception. The choice of words, their connotation and the syntactic organization of the text create a certain lens through which the recipient evaluates the events.

Manipulative techniques are widely used to achieve psychological, political, financial and physical coercion. In fact, manipulation is violence, but it is also more treacherous since it affects the subconscious, changes our perception of the world, serves the needs of other people and depletes our individuality (*Prabhat Indora, 2025*).

Manipulation in media discourse is manifested through a number of lexical mechanisms. The most obvious is the nominative choice: the same event can be represented by different lexical units, evoking opposite reactions. Internet manipulative techniques are associated with the use of additional textual, linguistic and audiovisual components of manipulation. In this context they receive a certain hyper textual composition and, with the help of psychotechnologies, channel our attention in the desired direction (*Prabhat Indora, 2025*). For instance, the phrase “freedom fighters” creates a positive image of freedom fighters, while rebels or insurgents are associated with aggression and threat. The employment of such lexical choices carries the ideological attitude that directs the reader's emotional perception. The study “Lexical Choice and Critical Discourse Analysis of Language Bias in Media” confirms that the choice of words in journalistic materials directly affects the perception of the event, since it reflects the author's attitude and structures the ideological subtext of the text (*Das, 2011*).

Another manipulation tool is evaluative vocabulary, which sets the emotional tone of the statement. Thus, reports on socio-political events often employ words such as “*threaten*”, “*deepen*”, “*collapse*”, “*turmoil*”, which create the atmosphere of danger. Headlines like “*Global crisis deepens as conflict spreads*” do not simply inform, but impose a sense of urgency and fear, which is a typical technique for influencing the emotional state of the audience. Manipulations work because they use psychological mechanisms that force people to perceive information uncritically (*Nagorna, 2024: 66*).

Metaphorization underpins the process of conceptual framing since it performs a cognitive function and has a pronounced manipulative effect. Metaphors such as “*battle against climate change*” or “*the economy is healing*” allow us to perceive abstract processes through specific images – war or the human body. As a result, a simplified but emotionally rich picture of the world is formed.

Framing, i.e., creating an interpretive framework for events through lexical selection, merits special scholarly consideration, as it functions as a critical mechanism through which media texts structure reality and influence audience perception. For instance, the use of the words “*crisis*”, “*challenge*”, “*war*”, “*fight*” in the same context can set a narrative of confrontation, while “*opportunity*”, “*progress*”, “*partnership*” – the one of development. Thus, vocabulary determines not only the factual, but also the axiological structure of the text, reinforcing particular ideologies. In this sense, the lexical code of the media is a means of conveying meanings, reproducing not only informational, but also power-ideological relations.

In general, the manipulative function of the lexical code is to create a certain emotional and cognitive effect intended to shape the preferred interpretation of events. Through lexemes with positive or negative connotations, metaphors, frames and stylistic transformations, the media create a linguistic picture of the world in which social ideals, conflicts and values are entrenched. Thus, the lexical code of contemporary English-language media discourse is not only a tool for representing concepts, but also an effective mechanism for influencing mass consciousness.

4. Conclusions

The conducted study provides a comprehensive research of the phenomenon of lexical code in contemporary English-language media texts as a system of linguistic means that verbalize key concepts of contemporary media discourse. The undertaken analysis illustrates that lexical code functions not only as a tool for nomination and conveyance of information, but also as a powerful mechanism for social, political, and cultural reality conceptualization.

It was determined that the concepts of “freedom,” “innovation,” and “identity” are dominant in the English-language media space, since they reflect the fundamental values and semantic guidelines of contemporary Western society. Their linguistic expression is articulated through the selection of lexemes with a distinct evaluative and connotative potential, the active use of stylistic devices, in particular metaphors, other nominations, neologisms and phraseological units. The concept of “freedom” is objectified through the vocabulary of struggle and defense of democratic rights. The concept of ‘innovation’ – through lexical units denoting movement, breakthrough and technological development, whereas the concept of “identity” – through the vocabulary of social belonging, diversity and tolerance.

The results of the analysis showed that the choice of lexical means in media discourse performs not only a representative but also a manipulative function. It is through employed lexical units with certain connotations that media texts influence the emotional and cognitive spheres of the recipient, shaping the desired interpretative framework for the perception of events. This is manifested in framing, evaluative vocabulary, metaphorization and semantic opposition of concepts (freedom vs. threat, innovation vs. crisis, identity vs. conflict). Thus, lexical code is not only a reflection of reality, but also a means of its construction.

Methodologically, the study was based on a cognitive-discursive approach, which allowed us to reveal the relationship between the linguistic form, conceptual content and social context. The method of contextual-semantic analysis revealed the peculiarities of the functioning of key lexemes in specific media texts; the use of critical discourse analysis made it possible to trace the connection between lexical choices and ideological attitudes.

Therefore, the lexical code of contemporary English-language media texts appears as a complex semiotic system that integrates cognitive, value-based and ideological parameters of social communication. Its study lays the foundation for further scientific research in the identification of the patterns of linguistic influence, the dynamics of the concept sphere of media discourse and the development of critical thinking in the perception of media messages.

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