DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF "UKRAINIAN REFUGEE" IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN MEDIA

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Abstract. *The current paper analyzes the lexical and stylistic mechanisms of the construction of the Ukrainian refugee image in contemporary media discourse, with a particular focus on The New York Times, a leading American newspaper. Media discourse is understood here as a field of mass communication that implies multiple linguistic practices and information flows. Media discourse is notable for its multimodality, interdiscursivity, dynamics, and its addressing of a large and heterogeneous audience. One of the defining features of modern media discourse is its increasing intertextuality and the fluid boundary between written and oral communication, which causes it to transform traditional forms of language. The semantic analysis showed that the Ukrainian refugee is most commonly represented through invoking large numbers of displaced persons (15%) in host countries (11%), successful employment outcomes outside of their home nation (11%), and border crossing problems (9%). Additional frequent themes are U.S. sponsorship programs (8%), temporary returns to Ukraine for healthcare (8%), and access to education (7%). The other theme fields appeared less frequently (6% to 4%). Overall, Ukrainian refugees in the discourse being examined are represented primarily through quantitative information, host countries' reactions, and success of integration, and to a lesser extent through personal experiences of displacement or leaving. Stylistic analysis of the articles in The New York Times indicates a preference for metonymy, where countries or governments are used to refer to citizens or government officials. Epithets are recurrent, used both to convey the refugees' plight and the contrast with their new, more hopeful environment. Metaphors conveying the influence of external conditions, political or natural, on the refugees' lives also contribute to the richness of the discourse style. Out of 442 stylistic devices identified, metonymy accounted for 30%, epithets for 19%, metaphors for 17%, and special syntactic constructions for 14%. The remaining devices were used with a lesser frequency (0.2%). These findings suggest that the use of stylistic devices plays an important role in creating the verbal image of Ukrainian refugees in U.S. media. Additional studies may entail comparing the representation of Ukrainian refugees in the media of other English-speaking countries.*

Key words: *discourse analysis, semantics, stylistic devices, media, representation, image of a Ukrainian refugee, The New York Times.*

ДИСКУРСИВНА РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦІЯ «УКРАЇНСЬКОГО БІЖЕНЦЯ» В СУЧАСНИХ АМЕРИКАНСЬКИХ МЕДІА

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Анотація. У статті аналізуються лексичні й стилістичні механізми конструювання образу українського біженця в сучасному медіадискурсі з особливим акцентом на The New York Times, провідній американській газеті. Медіадискурс розуміється як сфера масової комунікації, що передбачає численні лінгвістичні практики й інформаційні потоки. Медіадискурс вирізняється своєю мультимодальністю, інтердискурсивністю, динамічністю та зверненням до великої й неоднорідної аудиторії. Однією з визначальних рис сучасного медіадискурсу є його все більша інтертекстуальність і плинна межа між письмовою й усною комунікацією, що змушує його трансформувати традиційні форми мови. Семантичний аналіз показав, що український біженець найчастіше представлений через велику кількість переміщених осіб (15%) у країнах перебування (11%), успішні результати працевлаштування за межами рідної країни (11%) і проблеми з перетином кордону (9%). Додатковими частими темами є програми спонсорства США (8%), тимчасове повернення до України для отримання медичної допомоги (8%) і доступ до освіти (7%). Інші тематичні поля з'являлися рідше (від 6% до 4%). Загалом українські біженці в досліджуваному дискурсі представлені переважно кількісною інформацією, реакцією країн, що приймають, та успіхом інтеграції, меншою мірою через особистий досвід переміщення або виїзду. Стилістичний аналіз статей у The New York Times указує на перевагу метонімії, де країни чи уряди використовуються для позначення громадян чи урядовців. Епітети є повторюваними, використовуються як для передачі тяжкого становища біженців, так і для контрасту з їхнім новим, більш обнадійливим середовищем. Метафори, що передають вплив зовнішніх умов, політичних чи природних, на життя біженців, також сприяють багатству стилю дискурсу. Із 442 виявлених стилістичних прийомів метонімія становила 30%, епітети – 19%, метафори – 17%, а спеціальні синтаксичні конструкції – 14%. Решта прийомів використовувалися з меншою частотою (0,2%). Ці результати свідчать про те, що використання стилістичних прийомів відіграє важливу роль у створенні вербального образу українських біженців в американських ЗМІ. Додаткові дослідження можуть включати порівняння репрезентації українських біженців у ЗМІ інших англомовних країн.

Ключові слова: дискурс-аналіз, семантика, стилістичні засоби, медіа, репрезентація, образ українського біженця, The New York Times.

Problem statement. In the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, which has caused a massive wave of internal and international displacement, the media have become the main source of information about Ukrainian refugees for an international audience. Therefore, the formation of their image in English-language news is important for understanding the social and political situation, as well as for influencing the public perception of these individuals in different countries. The increased flow of migrants to other countries of the world has caused the need for more detailed coverage of this problem, and rapid pressing improves the important role in forming a significant impact on the emotional perception of any information by people, and editors are increasingly resorting to the use of various stylistic resources. In modern society, disinformation is the main movement of progress; mass media discourse plays a key role in shaping public opinion and a person's worldview. It is also called media discourse, and it is presented as a complex of processes and products of speech activity in the field of mass communication, which have various forms and complex relationships [1, p. 21].

The issue of studying mass media discourse occupies a central place in modern linguistics, reflecting the significance of social, political, philosophical, cultural and linguistic trends that

suggest functioning. The rapid development of technologies in the 21st century has led to the widespread use of technical means of communication and increased attention to information flows. Modern man can no longer imagine his life without the press, television, radio or the Internet. Researchers (I. G. Miroshnichenko) increasingly use the terms "mediatised society" and "mediatised personality".

Ukrainian researcher I. G. Miroshnichenko defines media discourse as a sphere of mass communication that encompasses various language practices and channels of information transmission [2, p. 38]. She identifies its characteristic features, such as multimodality, interdiscursiveness, dynamism and orientation to a wide audience.

Irish scholar E. O'Keeffe emphasises that modern media discourse is characterised by the growth of intertextuality and the blurring of boundaries between oral and written forms of communication [3, p. 442].

Mass media not only disseminate information but also form social values and regulate social processes. The persuasiveness of media discourse plays a key role in influencing the behaviour and worldview of the audience through the use of various linguistic strategies and tactics.

Modern technologies have significantly changed communication in the media space. If earlier mass communication was a one-way process controlled by the media, today every user can take an active part in blogs, forums and social networks. This contributes to the dialogic nature of media discourse [4, p. 5]. In addition, modern studies of media discourse use interdisciplinary methods that combine structural, functional, contextual, linguocognitive and pragmatic approaches [5, p. 39]. Particular attention is paid to such aspects as hypertextuality, interactivity and audiovisual elements that expand the boundaries of media communication.

Aim and scope. The aim of our research is the need to study the semantic and stylistic features of creating the image of Ukrainian refugees, as well as to identify the influence of the mass media on the formation of public perception and identification of Ukrainians in the international context. Achieving this goal involves solving the following tasks: to study the main methods of influencing media discourse on people's behaviour; to conduct a semantic and stylistic analysis of the features of representing the image of a Ukrainian refugee in modern English-language mass media discourse.

Research object and subject. The object of the study is the process of forming the image of Ukrainian immigrants in English-speaking media, and the subject is the specific semantic and stylistic means by which this image is formed.

Research and findings. To examine how the image of the Ukrainian refugee is represented in English-language media discourse, we analysed 50 articles from the American newspaper *The New York Times*. All of them focus on the refugee crisis following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation from March 2022 to March 2025.

Semantic analysis revealed that Ukrainian refugees are primarily portrayed through quantitative and thematic emphasis. The most common representations include references to the sheer number of displaced individuals (65 instances), the listing of mostly European host countries (50 instances), extensive opportunities for employment abroad (50 instances), and detailed accounts of the refugee journey and border crossings (41 instances). Additionally, the coverage frequently draws comparisons with the 2015 European migrant crisis (32 instances). The following are examples of typical linguistic expressions used to construct this media image.

This is how the growing number of Ukrainian refugees in European countries is described:

*"On Friday, Mr. Biden shifted most of his focus to the human dimensions of what he called Mr. Putin's "war of choice". He listened as Mr. Duda described the grim **plight of Ukrainians** who have arrived in a **never-ending flow** at Polish border communities"* [6].

The main reasons for refugees are:

Fear of destruction: *"Photographs out of Kharkiv on Friday showed a **large fireball and nearby cars and buildings on fire**, as residents fled on foot and bicycle, carrying whatever belongings they could grab in the aftermath of the attack. In the central city of Dnipro, **Russian missile strikes on a military facility destroyed buildings**"* [6].

Searching for a safe place to live (often combined with feelings of guilt towards other people who are left in danger): *"When Leia's family reached Vienna two weeks ago, she was **relieved, but also guilty** because she was **safe** and so many others **were not**"* [6].

However, refugees are at risk of human trafficking:

*"Interpol has already received **reports of human traffickers and smugglers** waiting at various border control checkpoints **to prey on vulnerable populations arriving from Ukraine**"* [6].

Since Ukrainian refugees are predominantly white and Christian, they are welcomed in the European Union and post-communist countries that still remember life under Moscow's rules: *"Unlike the migrants beaten back from the border by Polish guards last year, **Ukrainians, who are mostly Christian and white, have a legal right to enter Poland and other European Union countries** without visas. Nearly a million Ukrainians already live in Poland"* [6].

European countries have opened wide opportunities for Ukrainian refugees to find employment (also 50 examples), filling the niches created by the outflow of their own population (especially Polish) to work in the Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands): *"The influx is seen as a **boon in Lithuania**, a country that has long grappled with labor **shortages linked to an aging population, a declining birthrate and the migration of young people in Europe** in search of well-paying jobs"* [6].

Ukrainians are known all over the world for their education and high professional qualities: *"Many of those arriving have **diplomas, including journalists, lawyers, tech programmers and engineers**, while others have worked in **skilled labor positions**, she said"* [6].

Also, refugee children have the opportunity to attend local schools and kindergartens and learn the language: *"So far, Vienna has offered around **250 Ukrainian students** spots in "New in Vienna" classes and enrolled **about 800 children and teenagers** into its public and private **schools**, a number that is equivalent to less than one percent of the existing student population"* [6].

Despite the attractive conditions of stay, many Ukrainians return home to Ukraine from time to time to see family members who are unable to leave, to apply for property documents, and, often, to receive proper qualified medical care, which is lacking in the European Union due to the difference in the system of providing medical services: *"Many refugees said that their trips home had been **prompted by frustration with health systems in Europe that they see as deficient**. That has been particularly true in **Britain**, where there have been news reports of **refugees' dissatisfaction with the crisis-hit National Health Service**"* [6].

The influx of Ukrainian immigrants is often compared to the migrant crisis in Europe in 2015: *"The warm embrace of Ukrainian refugees is a stark contrast to a **European refugee crisis in 2015**, when more than a million refugees, many of them fleeing **conflict in the Middle East and Africa**, poured into the bloc, spurring an **anti-immigrant backlash** and support for political parties on the far right"* [6].

However, over time, Western society, especially Poland, began to tire of the war and the influx of Ukrainian refugees and began to introduce certain measures, such as cutting benefits, housing, or education: *"By year's end, **Poland will have spent more on housing, health and other services for Ukrainians** than any European country, according to a study by the Polish Economic Institute. As the country, like much of Europe, copes with inflation and high gas prices, there are signs that **fatigue** may be setting in with some slice of the Polish electorate"* [6].

Thus, the image of a Ukrainian refugee is highlighted mainly by their number (15%) in various countries of the world (11%), their successful employment there (11%), a description of border crossing and the difficulties associated with it (9%), there are also numerous mentions of US sponsorship programs with varying degrees of success in their implementation (8%), their temporary return to their homeland, mostly to receive qualified medical services (8%), and the provision of the right to education (7%). Other topics are highlighted from 6% to 4%.

We found the following **stylistic means** for expressing the image of a Ukrainian refugee: epithet (84 examples), metonymy (135 examples), metaphor (76 examples), personification (20), allusion (10), antithesis (25), and comparison (27 examples). Among the syntactic ones, only isolated constructions (61 examples), anaphora (2), and epiphora (2) were found.

Epithets, appearing in 84 instances (19% of all stylistic devices), are primarily expressed through adjectives with negative connotations (65 examples). These are commonly used to describe the appearance, living conditions, movement of refugees, or the lives they were forced to abandon: *"He looked **terrified** but said he had to risk the **perilous** journey to the **besieged** capital to save his family"* [6].

Positive adjectives-epithets (19) were used to describe the new places of residence of Ukrainian refugees or the friendly attitude towards them of the local population: *"And beyond the **bountiful** offers of work…"* [6].

Metonymy (135 examples, 30%) consists of transferring the qualities of the whole to the part and vice versa. Usually, they are the names of countries instead of their population (Ukraine, Poland), the names of governments or government buildings (Kremlin, government) instead of the names of presidents or commanders: *"The **exodus** from Ukraine **gathered pace** on Friday as **fear spread** that the **Kremlin intends to impose** its will far beyond just the east of the country"* [6]. The Russian government and Putin are expressed through the generalisation Kremlin is the main government building of Russia.

Metaphor is represented by 76 examples, which transfer the qualities of one concept to the other. *"And Ukrainian suffering at the hands of Russia has **stirred sympathy in the formerly communist lands** of East and Central Europe"* [6]. In this example, the metaphor 'to stir sympathy' is combined with the metonymy 'in the formerly communist lands,' where the phrase stands in for the people living in those regions.

Personification, or a type of metaphor, endows inanimate objects or phenomena with the qualities of living things. It is not as numerous as metaphors and consists of 20 examples. For instance, *"Some **offers** are aimed at filling **openings that have languished** in Europe since the reopening of economies after coronavirus lockdowns"* [6]. The proposals seem to be filling the job gaps that appeared in Europe during the lockdown.

Allusion is a reference to known historical facts, biblical stories, or historical events. Ten such examples have been identified: *"As the wartime **exodus** from Ukraine grows larger, …"* [6]. The exodus of refugees from Ukraine is comparable to the exodus of the Jews from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. Another example shows that hostile attitude towards Ukrainians in Poland has been compared to the period of segregation in the United States, when the best seats on buses were for whites and the back for blacks;

or to the Nazi attitude towards Jews: *"…different from putting up a sign in public transport saying, "**seats for whites only**" or a restaurant telling customers that "**Jews are not allowed**"* [6].

Comparison consists of 27 examples. *"The **influx** is seen as a **boon** in Lithuania"* [6]. The arrival of Ukrainian refugees in Lithuania is seen as a blessing from God.

According to the data, a third (30%) of the stylistic devices used to describe the image of a Ukrainian refugee are metonymy, a fifth (19%) are epithets, 17% are metaphors, and 14% are isolated constructions. The remaining stylistic devices were few in number (6%).

Conclusions and further research prospects. The research shows that the image of the Ukrainian refugee in contemporary American media discourse, as embodied in The New York Times, is formed through a combination of quantitative lexis patterns and affective stylistic devices. Media discourse revolves around the extent of displacement, the geography of host countries, employment opportunities, and escape and resettlement challenges. This lexical construal is supplemented by regular application of stylistic devices that create readers' emotional and cognitive understandings.

Metonymy is frequent, with government and country names functioning as substitutes for officials and populations, and so deflecting attention from individuals to institutions. Epithets, especially pejorative ones, are employed to characterise both the adversity of displaced persons and, occasionally, the relative comfort of their new environments. Metaphors add further depth, assigning human feeling or political import to environmental and geopolitical processes, heightening emotional impact. and engagement in narrative. Overall, these stylistic strategies are central to the verbal construction of the image of the Ukrainian refugee in the discourses under scrutiny.

Future studies could compare the portrayal of Ukrainian refugees in different English-language media outlets or discourses, i.e., political, humanitarian, or social media texts. This research could further enhance our knowledge of how national, cultural, and ideological contexts affect the media framing of refugee experience.

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