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SYMBOLIC NATURE, CULTURAL CODES AND MEDIA FUNCTIONALITY OF “THE RUSSIAN WARSHIP” MEME Part two

The purpose of the research is to analyze the symbolism, cultural codes of miscellaneous modifications of one of the most widespread Ukrainian memes in 2022 — the Russian warship meme, its role in the creation and development of the latest media discourses; it also specifies the tendencies concerning the meme use in mass media publications. The subject of the study is “the Russian warship” meme and a group of its modifications spread in the media environment after January 24, 2022. It is stated that the media area of the meme’s functioning is extremely wide, it is not only spread verbally but also visually, represented by a range of media and mass media genres: from posts on social networks from the state public officers to individual media projects and media branding. A peculiarity of this meme is also the fact that it crosses the borders of a nationally-oriented media environment by the rules of news-related genres as topical and socially important information. Another peculiarity of the meme’s circulation is the fact that its verbal core is an obscene expression, the use of which is exceptionally limited according to the standards of numerous lingual cultures. Thanks to the methods of narrative analysis, generalization and interpretation the author of the article determines the meme’s role in the formation of new kinds of discourse of heroics and immortality, which are important in the conditions of hybrid war and information confrontation.

As a result of our research, we explain that the meme becomes a symbol of brave and desperate resistance to unjustified military aggression, a violation of the world order established after World War II. Studying an ironic philological media discourse of the Russian warship meme exhibits its transgressive nature on one hand, i. e. the function of prohibitions overcoming during critical extremal situations and on the other hand, demonstrates the significance of the meme for national self-identification processes. The article specifies the tendencies for change in meme’s media functionality, which lies in the gradual down-toning of the obscene categorical nature of a verbal structure through its substitution with ellipsed options, metaphoric euphemisms, allusive expressions, etc. The novelty lies in the study of the functionality of the meme in various media discourses, in particular professional journalistic, heroic mythological, ironic philological, etc. Further study of the meme at different stages of its media lifecycle can be perspective.

The article is presented in two parts. This issue deal with the linguacultural code of this meme.

Keywords: the Russian warship meme; media; mass media; cultural codes; media discourse.

LINGUACULTURAL CODE “WE” — “THEY” OF “THE RUSSIAN WARSHIP” MEME

It is important to mention a certain peculiarity of the obscene expression “*idi nakhui*” functioning as a meme in the media discourse, which is topical exactly for the Ukrainian media discourse and can be unclear for the representatives of other cultures. It is about complicity of its identification under an attribute of linguacultural dichotomy as “we” — “they”. In other words, despite the expression being known to the majority of speakers, a part of them perceives it as alien, unacceptable and even hostile not only because they consider inappropriate the use of profanity, but also because they view it as an attribute of the aggressor’s linguaculture.

On one hand, the expression of “*idi nakhui*” contains sexual invective strategy, clear for the representatives of different linguacultures without translation due to their native obscene equivalents — an emotional and derogatory expression of categorical disagreement to fulfil the opponent’s request and asking them to leave a particular space. This, particularly, can be seen in Table 1 comparing the meanings and examples of the use of the expression *idi nakhui* in Ukrainian, Polish and Russian. For this purpose, the dictionaries by L. Stavycka (2008, pp. 396–397), M. Grochowski (1995, p. 49) and V. Bui (2005, pp. 32–35) were used.

On the other hand, the word *khui*, according to the classification of the Ukrainian obscene lexis dictionary by L. Stavycka is a profanity, which is attributed, first of all, to the Russian linguaculture.

Table 1. Comparison of use of *idi nakhui* obscene expression in Ukrainian, Polish and Russian

LANG.	EXPRESSION	MEANING	EXAMPLES
Ukrainian	Ігй (пітй) нá хуй (нахуй) Ity (pity) nakhui	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expression of disregard to someone, intention to humiliate someone. Literally: forcing to have homosexual contact, which dramatically lowers someone's social status; • demand to go away from somewhere, from the view of someone; to leave a particular space; • expression of a wish to stop relations or communication with someone; leave; • expression of categorical refusal to perform someone's demand, request, advice, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ [діть ви всі нахуй. І ти, Тало, відпочивай, раз таке діло. ✓ Сінті, що зараз, либонь, вечеряє десь на острові Ява, хочеться для мене станцювати. Або й не хочеться. Ну то пішла на хуй. ✓ Богдане, говорити, не ходи, залишся тут, пішла на хуй, повчально говорить Боб і виходить у ранковий під'їзд. ✓ [Чорт:] Ну, розкажуй, як живеш, як жінка? [Іван Опанасович:] Та пішла вона на хуй!
Polish	Niech ktoś idzie do i w chuja	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the speaker ignoring somebody specifically at a certain point in time; • the speaker wants somebody to leave them alone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ NP Nie będe słucać jego wynurzeń. Niech idzie do chuja! ✓ Ale balaganu narobi! Niech idzie w chuja!
Russian	Идти на хуй (Idti nakhui)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • swear, specification by the speaker of inappropriate requests, demands, offers or claims of someone, performed in a humiliating for the addressee manner of a wish to go to the place which is beyond the private area of the speaker; • swear, expression by the speaker of a strong wish to discontinue any communication or interrelation with someone or something performed in a humiliating for the addressee manner of a wish to move to the place beyond the private area of the speaker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Другая [из очереди], с сильным изъёмом в лице: И мне, Витя, дай вон тех дынь. Продавец: А ты, косоротая, пошла на хуй. ✓ Чапаев вернулся из Италии. Петька пристаёт: — Ну, Василь Иванович! Скажи что-нибудь питальнянски! — Пошел на хуй, Петруччо [Городской фольклор]

The researcher pays attention to the availability of three types of invective strategies among the people of the European area: *Shit (Scheiss)-culture* (German, Czech, English, and French), *Sex-culture* (Russian, Serbian, Croatian, and Bulgarian), *Sacrum-culture* (Czech, Slovakian, Polish). Moreover, notice the conditional character of this typization: “domination of a particular lexis at different historic stages mirrors, in a peculiar way, the conceptual foundations of being of each ethnos, its ethno-mental stereotypes and psychophysiological preferences” (Stavycka, 2008, p. 34).

If a sexual dominant is indicative of the Russian obscene lexicon (*hui — pizda — jibaty*), for Ukrainian it is scatological. In other words, a Russian will sooner send an opponent *nakhui* and a Ukrainian, taking this expression as beastly, uses the equivalent of profanity — “*u sraku*”.

The text of the video recorded by Volodymyr Zelenskyi, who was not the President but a medial and famous person at that time, can serve as an illustration to the statement above:

The Deputy, whose surname is Barna, sent a journalist to three letters. He said: “*Idi na ***!*” (video insert with profanity — *author's note*). But I think that in the person of this journalist he (sent — *author's note*) all journalists. I think that I am fairly from all the media with a response message. But I cannot send a person to these three letters, it is simply impolite. I think that you all, guys, will not have enough place there. And we have found for you a warm, cosy, reliable place. So, go into ass! (Vova Zelenskyi — *idit u sraku*)

The expression used “send to three letters” is a euphemism, synonymic to *idy nakhui*. Pay attention that the author says the main text in Russian, but the expression of *idy u sraku* — in Ukrainian.

Hence, the paradoxicality of the situation lies in the fact that the expression *Russkiy voyennyi korabl. Idi nakhui* develops its special meaning in the situation of

counterstanding “we” — “they” as a spontaneous pushback to the aggressor and then it is being shared in the network as an embodiment of the idea of a victorious fight against the enemy who does not only threaten one's country but to the whole world order. Moreover, the circulating expression contains a linguacode not only perceived as alien but intrinsic to the aggressor's linguaculture.

For the Ukrainian national discourse, the issue concerning dissociation from the “alien” imperial cultural codes is not only topical but, one can say, vital for saving its identity, especially after the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation. Thus, it tells not about the unfriendliness of the Ukrainians to the other national cultures but about the protection of its own one from the aggressive strategies of hybrid introduction and imposing of an alien one: “In the profound basis of this argumentation there is, as it seems prevailing, a ‘defensive’ position — an intention to defend the Ukrainian language in the unequal (yet) competition with the Russian language in Ukraine — and centrifugal tendencies to complete the distancing of the Ukrainian language from Russian” (Taranenko, 2009). Thus, this is a sophisticated topic requiring individual research, that is why as an illustration to the thesis worded, an example of a language policy can be provided — a so called “protection of the Russian-speaking population”, which the aggressor country applies not only to Ukraine but also to other countries of the post-Soviet space (FRukr).

O. Taranenko, a Ukrainian linguist, notes that the factor of availability or absence of dirty and cynic curses (“swearing”) is to be on the first place in moral-and-judgmental dissociation of the Ukrainian and Russian languages; moreover, there are two opposite views on what this dissociation must be (Taranenko, 2009).

The followers of the first point of view (they are ordinary speakers, researches and public doers, etc.) identify the obscene lexis (swearing, profanities) as non-intrinsic to Ukrainian culture but intrinsic to the Moscovian one (Russian). An example of this view in

the media discourse can be a publication with an eloquent headline “Profanities that will make you a Ukrainian. How to swear correctly”. Its author specifies: *“Many people, especially among educated ones, started to speak Ukraine and faced expressive difficulties because the creative process is impossible without a fruity profanity. And suddenly it appears to be that profanities are ‘a truly Russian’ phenomenon. What to do for a conscious patriot? Our people, thanks God, have heritage in this field, too”* (C, 31.01.2016).

The followers of the second point of view believe that the exception of profanities from the Ukrainian linguacultural code is a mistake, since the origin of this lexis is proto-Slavic: although “direct” people’s names of reproductive organs and coitus are, as known, common Slavic and began to be perceived as beastly, perhaps, after Christianizing and damning everything that concerns “the lower part of the body”. They explain that the profanity’s circulation to be influenced by the Russian language, especially during the Soviet period (a Russian-speaking environment in the towns, army, prisons, etc.). However, concerning the usage of swearing with sexual motivation and frequency of functioning, “the Ukrainian language would look and still looks significantly more modest compared to the Russian” (Taranenko, 2009).

Note that “the Russian warship” meme did not become an exception in this long-standing discussion, which has become only more intensive due to the war. As the analysis of the ironic philological discourse proves, the meme has followers from both camps. Pay attention to the fact that the meme, apart from the obscene expression itself, contains a direct reference to an alien social-and-linguaculture — the name of the country “Russian”.

IRONIC PHILOLOGICAL DISCOURSE OF “THE RUSSIAN WARSHIP” MEME

The conventional agreement of society to give an individual obscene expression a status of an allowed one caused a whole relatively philological discourse in media, which can be interpreted as postmodern ironic.

It, as assumed, relates to verbal transgression specified by the war and the violation of the ordered society’s life because in 2014 obscene expressions denoting the enemy and its actions were already in the area of publicity but at that time they were not as wide-spread and supported by the media. A publication from Gazeta.ua: *“Language experts researched that words ‘putin’ and ‘khuilo’ are single-rooted* is an example. The author of the publication in an ironic form, imitating the style of scientific research, speculates about correct translation of an obscene surname, which Ukrainian football fans began to call President Putin” (LEs, 04.09.2014). Not only the results of the author’s philological science intelligence certify about the irony of the post but so does the illustration to it with a picture of a T-shirt and words “Putin is putz, indeed (C) Odesa-mother” on it. This writing is stylized as Odesa’s sociolect where the word *putz* is used, which, in turn, originates from *ꙗꙗꙗ*, the direct meaning

of which is “penis” and in an indirect one means “fool”, “stupid person”.

The post on Facebook from the author of Redaktorka Yuliia Moroz can be considered illustrative of the ironic philological discourse of 2022 (EYM, 27.02.2022). This author is a specialist on philology who publishes regular posts with useful advice on the issues of language culture. One can say that in this publication the author writes in her usual style, the only thing that distinguishes the post from the rest is the available obscene lexis and explanations concerning its orthography (Figure 12).

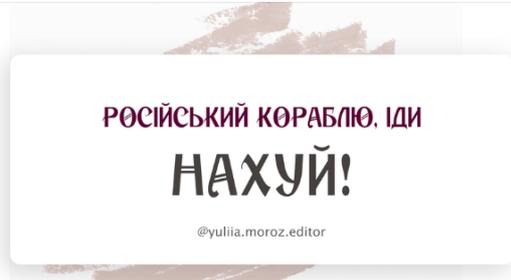
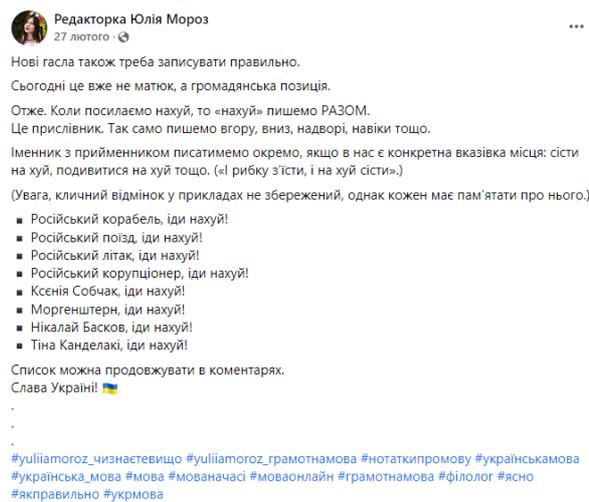


Figure 12. Screenshot of the post by Redaktorka Yuliia Moroz

Text of the post:

New slogans must also be written correctly. Today it is not a profanity yet, but a civic position. Thus, when we send nakhui, we write “nakhui” in one word. This is an adverb. The same way we write “vhoru” (up), “vnyz” (down), “nadvori” (outside), “naviky” (forever), etc. A noun and an adjective shall be written separately if there is a particular indication of place: sit onto khui, look at khui, etc.

Journalists also joined the ironic philological discourse. A newscaster, a radio journalist and a producer of the Ukrainian radio Dmytro Khorkin published a post with his explanation of the obscene expression’s orthography (Figure 13). The ironic context of the message perception is created by the contrast between its serious form and humorous content, uniting in one context the elements of formal, scientific and colloquial styles — lexical, visual, etc. (DKh, 07.03.2022)



Figure 13. Screenshot of the Facebook post of the radiojournalist and producer of the Ukrainian radio Dmitry Khorkin
The text of the post:

I, as a Docent of Taras Shevchenko Kyiv University and the Examination Commission Head of the Institute of Journalism, am deeply offended with wrong writing of the word “nakhui” — an adverb that means a direction (adverbial modifier of place, direction). According to the Orthography of the Ukrainian Language (Ukrainian language / NAS of Ukraine; O. O. Potebnia Institute of Linguistics; Institute of the Ukrainian Language) the adverbs created by combining adjectives and nouns are written as one word.

It was unexpected when representatives of the state service of Ukraine joined in on the ironic philological discourse. One of them, Andrii Bohdanovych, published a post with a screenshot of the letter-reply from NADS (The National Agency of Ukraine for Civil Service) Nataliia Aliushina with explanations concerning the use by the state officials of a famous phrase of the border guards from Zmiinyi Island (Figure 14). The letter specifies that the use of this expression is not a violation of Ukraine’s Code for State Official (RWSh, 22.03.2022).

The author of the publication “Group portrait with Khuilo” uses a range of obscene lexis with core of “khui”: Khuilo — an obscene name for the President of the aggressor country, Pidkhuilyk — an obscene name of the President of Belarus; Khuilostan — an obscene name for the aggressor country. In general, 27 lexical units per 676 words of the publication text.

Everything that could seem not so univocal appeared to be so univocal as never before. There are us and there is *Khuilo*. All who are together with us

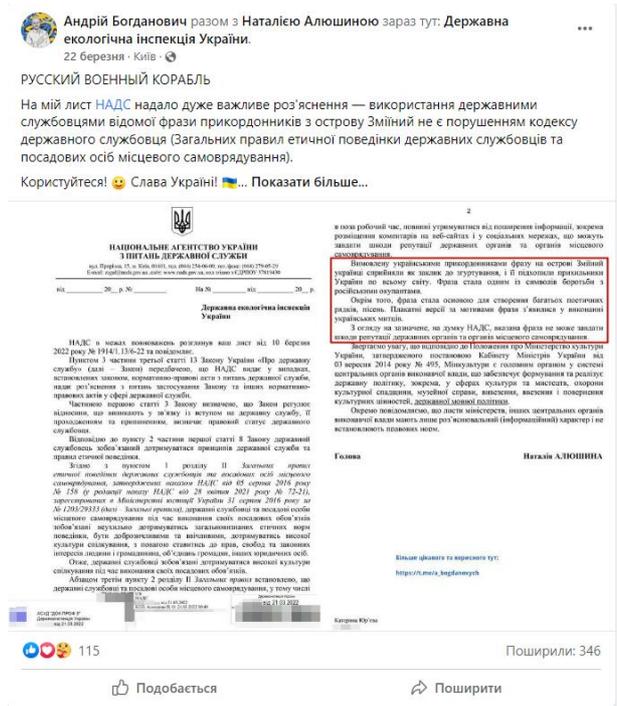


Figure 14. The screenshot of the state officer A. Bohdanovych on Facebook with the letter-reply from N. Aliushyna, NADS Head, with the explanations concerning the use by state officers of the phrase about the Russian warship

The part of the document marked in red: Ukrainians understood the phrase said by border guards on Zmiinyi Island as a call to become united, and it was caught by the supporters of Ukraine all over the world. The phrase became one of the symbols of struggle against the Russian occupants. Besides, the phrase became a basis for the creation of numerous poetic poems and songs. Poster versions after the motifs of the phrase were performed by Ukrainian artists. Taking into account the above mentioned, in NADS opinion, this phrase cannot harm the reputation of state agencies and local authorities.

against *Khuilo*, — are also us, even if just several days ago we promised to ourselves not to meet each other on the same gettare. All who are together with *Khuilo* against us — are also *Khuilo*. Either his Belarussian *Pidkhuilyk* (i. e. a person who does not have own will and obeys somebody stronger — note by O. Zhuravska). (BO, 28.02.2022)

The ironic philological discourse represents the main aspects of a serious problem, which has been discussed in Ukrainian society several times and tightly relates to search by the Ukrainians of their self-identity and the refusal or consent to cancelling of taboo for the use of profanity in the public space.

It is implemented both in the main texts of the publications in media, social networks and comments of the readers to these publications. The main argument of the opponents to introducing the obscene units with the core “khui” into the public environment is a categorical denial of its belonging to the Ukrainian linguaculture, its perception as alien, “Moscovian”. Compare several examples of the comments from the

readers: *“Dear Sir Olexandr! How can high national culture of Ukrainians be united with the use of swearing?! Any swearing word of Russian origin is pollution of the Ukrainian spiritual space, humiliation of sacral memory of all the Russian occupation victims! (BO, 28.02.2022)”*; *“... I do not like a flow of swear words, which is around now, Russian by origin, though, let them be brought up and down!!! (BO, 28.02.2022)”*; *“Why should we follow a swearing Rusски, sirs... Evil spirits stick to the swearing. Let us leave this disgusting swearing”*; *“Either the world got crazy or I have mental problems! I am teaching my grandson that profanities mean lack of culture, that only stupid people use them, those whose vocabulary is poor but he tells me now that it is fashionable and now it is allowed to use cool profanity. Ukrainians, to allow profanities means to become similar to our enemy. We have to differ from the fascist orks at least by culture if not by language!”*

Thus, the ironic philological discourse revealed by “the Russian warship” meme, as it was assumed and demonstrated by the examples, perception by the representatives of the Ukrainian linguaculture of obscene units of denudative invective as alien. However, self-identification of “we” — “they” occurs under several types of cultural and linguistic codes: “Ukrainian” — “non-Ukrainian”, “intelligent” — “illiterate”, “sincere” — “hypocrite”, “we” — “enemies”, etc.

Using a meme-expression, the Ukrainian speaker is self-identified, exploiting the code of other linguaculture as a shield, humiling the enemy with their own weapon. Moreover, the intention of this invective is forced through the connotation of humiliation in the context of actions of the enemy themselves, who switches over to anti-language and already does not kill or destroy but rather “demilitarizes”, “rescues”, “frees”. This lingua-denudation demonstrates the enemy their insincerity, scoundrelism, ruins their fragile anti-world with the force of invective, saving the truth. Switching over to the language of the enemy is an important component of this process. Moreover, through this example one can see the implementation of such a strategy of invective use when the speaker prefers the alien invective as a ruder one: “This is the case, when common dislike of the culture covers the invective from the neighbouring, especially antagonistic cultural level. In this case it is supposed that the enemy’s language is ruder, worse than one’s own one, that is why its invectives are more aggressive” (Zhelvis, 2001, p. 163).

Recollect one more brilliant example of the meme use by the representative of other linguaculture – a Georgian. Remember that Georgia, the same as Ukraine, was a part of the USSR, so the Russian language was an active tool of imperial influence in this country too. Georgians learnt Russian and even now the older generation understands it while young Georgians use English as a language of international communication.

The first minutes of the video show the communication of two sailors in Georgian. Then one of them addresses to the third over the radio in English. He

asks if the latter represents the Russian ship. After a positive answer, the following dialogue in Russian unfolds:

The first Georgian sailor: Fine! Guys, we refuse to tow. We refuse to supply your steamboat.

The Russian sailor: Who is talking to us?

The first Georgian sailor: Chief Officer from Georgia. We will not supply your steamboat. Russian warship, go fuck ****!

The second Georgian sailor: Occupants, mother-fucker...

Russian sailor: Bosses, let’s leave politics behind. We are running out of fuel.

The first Georgian sailor: Well, if you are running out of fuel, you can use...

The first and the second Georgian sailors: paddles! (GS)

This example demonstrates how people who can communicate in different languages switch over to the foreign language and use its typical linguaculture’s obscene expression, based on the context born by the Ukrainian meme.

Conclusion. The group of “the Russian warship” memes covers a range of modifications with the semantic core of an obscene expression, in particular, in the implicit form. The meme is becoming widely spread in verbal and visual forms as well as presented by numerous media and mass-media genres (posts on social networks, publications in printed and internet editions, radio and TV materials, etc.).

The obscene core did not limit the area of meme’s usage but instead significantly extended it. Moreover, one should distinguish between the meme itself as a media phenomenon and as an act of communication with obscene lexis, which became the basis for meme’s creation. In the communication act (reply of the Ukrainian border guard to the Russian soldier), the obscene expression is used in the meaning recorded in the dictionaries. But in the media field it develops additional connotations specified by numerous intralinguistic and extralinguistic factors.

Introduction of “the Russian warship” meme into the official media discourse (the speeches of politicians and public doers, its use as an element of issuance of publication of printed and online editions, broadcasting on radio and television) specified the down-toning of the obscene verbal structure with its ellipsed options, allusions, etc.

As a component of several media discourses “the Russian warship” meme caused intensive debates in the media environment, the root of which is the problem of self-identity of Ukrainians as a nation. For discourse of heroism, the transgressive role of the “Russian warship” meme is important in the conditions of large-scale hostility of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine, which encourages the generation of new meaning, norms and values of the Ukrainian society. In this context, “the Russian warship” meme

becomes, first of all, a symbol of brave and disparate resistance to the unjustified warfare and violation of the world order established after World War II.

In discourses of heroism and immortality, “the Russian warship” meme can be called a cultural code renovating the connection of the country’s modernity and past, not falsely pathetic but moderately realistic with numerous losses.

Moreover, “the Russian warship” meme is an important component of the information resistance in this hybrid war as a basis for its heroics of a new period (the deeds of “Azovstal” heroes, “the Ghost of Kyiv”, the symbol of invincibility of the cupboard with a rooster in Borodianka, the story about cat Gloria’s rescue, the dog-pyrotechnist Patron, the legend about Chornobaivka, the little animal Bavovniatko, etc.) and an anti-propagandistic weapon.

Linguacultural codes of “the Russian warship” meme demonstrate its role in the processes of national self-identification that is implemented through the struggle against an aggressive strategy of introduction and imposing of an “alien” language, in particular, in a paradox way of appealing to the codes of the aggressor country’s linguaculture.

The transgressive nature of “the Russian warship” meme is fully revealed in the ironic philological discourse. Using the meme, the speaker uses the code of the other linguaculture as a shield, humiliates the enemy with its weapon. The intention of this invective is forced with the connotation of humiliation in the contexts of the enemy’s actions themselves that switched over to anti-language and already does not kill and destroy but rather “demilitarizes”, “rescues”, “liberates”. This lingual “denudation” demonstrates the enemy its insincerity, scoundrelism, ruins its fragile anti-world with a force of invective, rescuing the truth.

The research cannot be complete as of now and cover all the aspects of “the Russian warship” meme functioning in media environment.

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СИМВОЛІЧНА ПРИРОДА, КУЛЬТУРНІ КОДИ І МЕДІАФУНКЦІОНАЛЬНІСТЬ МЕМА «РУССКІЙ ВОЕННИЙ КОРАБЛЬ» Частина друга

Метою дослідження є аналіз символічної природи, культурних кодів різноманітних модифікацій одного з найпоширеніших українських мемів 2022 року, його ролі у творенні й розвитку новітніх медійних дискурсів, а також визначення тенденції щодо його використання в публікаціях мас-медіа. Предметом вивчення в розвідці є мем «Русській військовий корабель» і група його модифікацій, які поширилися в медіапросторі після 24 лютого 2022 року. Констатується, що сфера медійного функціонування мема колосальна, він поширюється не тільки у вербальній, але й візуальній формі, репрезентований цілою низкою медійних і мас-медійних жанрів, починаючи від постів у соцмережах від офіційних осіб у державі й закінчуючи брендуванням і окремих медійних проєктів, і медіа. Особливістю цього мема є також те, що він долає кордони національно орієнтованого медійного простору за законами новинних жанрів як актуальна й соціально значуща інформація. Особливістю поширення мема є те, що його вербальним ядром є обценний вислів, уживання якого за нормами багатьох лінгвокультур є вкрай обмеженим. Завдяки методам нарративного аналізу, узагальнення, інтерпретації автор статті визначає роль мема у формуванні новітніх різновидів дискурсу героїки, безсмертя, що важливі в умовах гібридної війни та інформаційного протистояння.

У результаті дослідження з'ясовано, що мем стає символом сміливості й відчайдушності спротиву безпричинній військовій агресії і порушенню встановленого після Другої світової війни світового порядку. У статті визначено тенденції в зміні медійної функціональності мема, що полягає в поступовому пом'якшенні обценної категоричності вербальної конструкції через заміну його еліпсованими варіантами, метафоричними евфемізмами, висловами-алюзіями тощо. Вивчення іронічного філологічного медіадискурсу мема «Русській військовий корабель» оприявнює, з одного боку, його трансгресивну природу, тобто функцію долавання заборон під час кризових граничних ситуацій, а з іншого боку, демонструє значущість мема для процесів національної самоідентифікації. Новизна дослідження полягає у вивченні функціональності мема в різних медійних дискурсах, зокрема професійного журналістського, міфологічного героїчного, філологічного іронічного тощо. Перспективним можна визначити подальше вивчення мема на різних етапах його медійного життєвого циклу.

Стаття подається у двох частинах. У цьому випуску розглядається лінгвокультурний код цього мема.

Ключові слова: мем «Русській військовий корабель»; медіа; мас-медіа; культурні коди; медіадискурс.

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