

## ***War is not a metaphor* in Ukrainian students' distressful writings: schemata, sensory language, and moral judgments**

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While the world is reviving from the overwhelming pandemic caused by the coronavirus, Ukraine is suffering extremely severe attacks on civil objects, like dwellings, hospitals, schools, universities, and critical civil infrastructure. There has been an unthinkable and unbelievable pain experienced by every citizen no matter their ethnic origin. Many citizens of Russian and Ukrainian origin and of other nationalities have been killed under the slogans of the propaganda of the Russian Federation.

The Ukrainian citizens are a courageous and unbreakable independent nation who help and support each other in this hard time and do their best to facilitate the sustainable functioning of all the systems and spheres of activity within the country.

The education system is facing an enormous challenge. Online learning continues, though severely interrupted by everyday blackouts. Any educator strives for providing the best quality of teaching and supporting students, especially those who are in the occupied territories or in the hot spot cities suffering from the daily shelling. Some of the students perished. Some lost their relatives, homes, and their ordinary lives. Many of the have become refugees...

University lecturers have adopted a range of flexible approaches to reduce stress and provide opportunities for students to graduate from university, to have a chance for a career and a normal life. At the same time, students have become witnesses to war-related events. Therefore, an experimental study has been designed to meet two objectives: to help students cope with stress through verbalization within the course of Stylistics and to collect their perceptions for generalizing and investigating the cognitive peculiarities of verbalizing impressions of stressful situations.

The study focuses on distressful essay writing as a reflection of the full-scale war unleashed by the Russian Federation against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, as witnessed by Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University students. In particular, the cognitive, psycholinguistic, and social parameters are registered as a result of the linguistic observations made while lecturing the course on the Stylistics of the English Language. The authentic linguistic dataset is analyzed through the lens of cognitive, psycholinguistic, and sociolinguistic perspectives.

**Description of the experiment.** The psychological and pedagogical conditions of the experiment were predetermined by objective circumstances. The academic process was interrupted on February 24, 2022. Prior to this date, the university was

working in a distance learning mode because of the persistent COVID-19 situation in Ukraine. The war caught students and pedagogical personnel all over the territory of the country early in the morning, in their homes or other places when they were alone or with their families. The university administration declared forced vacations until March 2022. In a month, the academic process was recovered under new conditions, still in a remote mode but with different technical and local infrastructure opportunities. This period was a time of highly stressful situations in which students and instructors found themselves as well as a time of psychological adaptation and physical relocation for survival purposes. The requirements for the students and conditions of completing assignments were partially mitigated in favor of asynchronous forms of learning the course content for giving the possibility to everyone to overcome difficulties and cope with the academic workload successfully.

The current topic of the sessions at that time was the cognitive metaphor theory by G. Lakoff. Apart from compulsory assignments, the graduate bachelor students were offered an optional task, which would allow them to maintain their performance at a high level and gain positive grades. They were assigned to write a survival story or an essay. The *War is not a metaphor* title was given as a sort of play on words opposing the metaphor of *war*, a commonly discussed cognitive metaphor by G. Lakoff within the cognitive metaphor theory which is used in representations of *struggle, battle, argument*, etc. The students were encouraged to use literary devices they have learned throughout the course and share their personal experiences of observing the war-related events and circumstances from their own point of view. The writings were assessed individually depending on the degree of literary devices used, the content was kept confidential. Later the essays were anonymized and used as a unified textual corpus.

**Research material, object, and subject.** Currently, the material of the study includes 40 English language distressful writing essays by fourth-year students who have experienced the war at the very beginning. Next term, about 40 more students will be offered to write essays on the same topic. The students will be asked to give their voluntary consent.

The object of the study is language manifesting students' states of being under stressful situations: affective state, self-control levels, emotional perception, judgments, and moral values. The subject of the study includes cognitive, psycholinguistic, and social parameters of distressful writing in representations of affective states.

The cognitive parameter will be explored based on the image schema theory by M. Johnson. Specifically, we are interested in the dominant schemata actuating the concept of *war* and manifesting in the language of the essays. Hypothetically, we

assume that the force group and spatial group schemata will prevail: *compulsion, counterforce, diversion, blockage, path, and up-down*.

The psycholinguistic parameter will be explored in terms of the sensory language used in the essays and its role in war-evoked distressful writings. Here we assume that visual, auditory, and tactile modalities of linguistic representations will manifest most frequently as primary perceptions of what was going on around the respondents.

The social parameter will be registered as a totality of cultural, sociological, ideological, and educational linguistic manifestations of personal judgments and moral values of the youth witnessing the war. As a preliminary observation, the focus is given to strong condemnation of the aggression and strong pro-Ukrainian civic position.

**Methods and procedure.** The study is qualitative and descriptive. The main methods are interviewing and linguistic observation augmented with the data of conceptual and stylistic linguistic analyses. The procedures include a theory review of the works on trauma, discourse studies, cognitive psychology, sensory linguistics, and social studies; identifying schemata charged language units in representations of the concept of *war*, identifying sensory language units in representations of emotional states as a response to the traumatizing events witnessed by the students, and revealing prevailing social attitudes to the events observed. Also, the study will be done in two phases: the first writings (at the beginning of the war) collected in spring 2022, and the second writings (after a year after the war was unleashed) are to be collected in spring 2023. The results will be compared and the changes in the perceptions and moral judgments will be registered.

**Findings.** Although it is a work-in-progress stage, the observations show that students need to share their experiences and verbalize their feelings. The value of the paper lies in capturing students' perceptions and self-awareness of traumatizing situations. The schemata analysis and linguistic analysis of sensory verbal means will reveal the peculiarities of the collective response of the young people to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine both as a traumatizing experience and strong civic-mindedness. The preliminary findings stimulate further empirical studies dedicated to reactions to war-related events expressed through language, the results of which will be helpful for designing psychological aid recommendations aimed at mitigating distress and increasing learning adaptivity under wartime conditions.

**Keywords:** *distress, essay writing, education, stylistics, sensory language, schemata, social attitudes*