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Summary. In the contemporary hybrid war, the manipulation of language plays a vital role in shaping narratives. This research focuses on the metaphorical analysis of the concept of “Crimea” within Ukrainian media discourse, specifically examining Russian-language texts published by the Ukrainian online outlet “Ukrainska Pravda” covering the period from 2014 to 2020. By utilizing methods proposed by J. Lakoff, M. Johnson, and N. Slukhai, this study seeks to identify recurring images of annexed Crimea and to understand the underlying narrative frames during the early phases of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The study explores how artefact metaphors, particularly “Crimea is a mousetrap,” “Crimea is a reserve,” “Crimea is a trophy,” “Crimea is not a gift,” “Crimea is a ship,” and “Crimea is a scarecrow,” have been employed as potent linguistic tools to shape and influence narratives in Ukrainian media discourse.

Keywords: hybrid war, cognitive linguistics, discourse, the concept of “Crimea,” cognitive metaphor, narrative

The contemporary geopolitical landscape is marked by a complex and multifaceted hybrid war initiated by Russia against Ukraine. This war extends beyond traditional military confrontation, extending into the realms of information warfare, propaganda, and linguistic manipulation. In this hybrid warfare, language and narratives are not just tools for conveying information, but strategic weapons employed to shape and influence the consciousness of media consumers, both domestically and internationally.

This research aims to describe the intricate web of narratives characterizing the image of Crimea in Ukrainian media discourse. At its core, the Russian-Ukrainian war is a battle for not only territorial control but also for the “hearts and minds” of those who follow the developments through various media channels. To understand the covert enemy narratives seeking to reshape the mindset of media consumers, we turn to the rich field of cognitive linguistics, particularly leveraging the potent analytical tool of cognitive metaphors. According to Z. Kövecses, a conceptual metaphor is “a systemic set of correspondences between two domains of experience” [5]. It actively functions as a means of manipulation, directly influencing the consciousness of media consumers bypassing the rational centres of reality.
perception. Consequently, cognitive metaphor becomes an effective weapon for altering human consciousness and a vehicle for disseminating enemy narratives.

Cognitive metaphors, especially those falling under the category of “artefactual metaphors,” serve as valuable instruments for examining the key concepts underpinning the current hybrid war. In this context, the concept of “Crimea” takes centre stage. The metaphorical framing of the “Crimea” concept has been the subject of extensive research among both Ukrainian and foreign linguists. These studies have delved into the multifaceted layers of meaning embedded in the concept of “Crimea” and the narratives it evokes.

Notably, V. Stepanov [4] explored the frame model of the culture-laden concept of “Crimean annexation,” using materials from The Guardian. In parallel, T. Pavliuk [3] examined the predicative structure of the “Crimea” concept within the context of Ukrainian media discourse in the early months of 2014. Additionally, this research field has seen significant contributions from various linguists, including V. Kureyko, I. Seregina, A. Chudinov, S. Tsirkunova, M. Suslov, and D. Goriacheva.

A noteworthy research project in this area is R. Szwed’s “Framing of the Ukraine-Russia Conflict in Online and Social Media” (2016). Szwed’s work reconstructs the network of pro-Russian narratives used on the internet to describe the Russian-Ukrainian war and presents manipulative tools and methods employed to discuss Crimea’s annexation and the Russian-Ukrainian war in internet news portals and social media [7]. Remarkably, the author managed to describe the system of pro-Russian discursive strategies and narratives disseminated in the comments of internet news portals to justify Russian aggression.

Despite the extensive research conducted in this field, the study of the metaphorical objectification of the concept of Crimea in Russian-language texts of Ukrainian media remains an area requiring further investigation. Of particular interest are the narratives promoted by Ukrainian news media to the masses during the initial stages of the Russian-Ukrainian war, before the onset of a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukrainian territory in 2022. It is crucial to explore the ways in which the concept of Crimea is depicted in these narratives, as well as the potential implications of such depictions. Further research in this area can provide valuable insights into the role of media in shaping public opinion and attitudes towards geopolitical conflicts.

The primary objective of this study is to identify and analyse the recurring narratives associated with the image of annexed Crimea within Russian-language texts published by the Ukrainian online outlet, “Ukrainska Pravda,” from 2014 to 2020. This is of paramount importance, as the invasion of Crimea was the first stage of the ongoing war, making the study of the concept of Crimea a critical endeavour.

To accomplish this research, we employ the metaphorical modelling method proposed by J. Lakoff and M. Johnson, complemented by N. Slukhai’s narrative extraction method based on the reference principle [6].

In the course of the investigation, as outlined in our previous works [1; 2], a diverse array of artefact metaphors was identified. We began by manually selecting metaphors with a target domain of “Crimea” with a specific focus on the artefact metaphor “Crimea is an object.” These metaphors were then categorized based on their respective source domains. Afterwards, the narratives that emerged from each
metaphor group were identified and then classified into two primary categories: pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian. Notably, it was found that pro-Ukrainian narratives overwhelmingly prevailed in the Ukrainian media discourse, which highlights the rejection and replacement of pro-Russian narratives. Some of the relevant metaphorical models include:

1. “Crimea is a mousetrap”: Мышеловка Путина, которую он организовал для нас в Крыму, не сработала (01.04.2014). The metaphor portrays Crimea as a strategic device employed by Russia to provoke conflict and extend its territorial ambitions. Russia's annexation of Crimea serves as a reminder of its aggressive agenda and blatant disregard for international law. The pro-Ukrainian narrative highlights this fact, emphasizing the importance of standing up to such aggression and supporting Ukrainian resistance.

2. “Crimea is a reserve”: Крым превратился в заповедник просоветской ностальгии (18.05.2019). Crimea's annexation is viewed as a manifestation of Soviet nostalgia and a regressive step towards the past. The region's future as part of Russia is perceived as bleak, lacking the potential for significant growth and development. The pro-Ukrainian narrative, in particular, considers it as a step backwards from their country's democratic and progressive ideals.

3. “Crimea is a trophy”: Кремль лишил диванных патриотов такой возможности, превратив Крым в почетный трофей, символ российской вседозволенности и украинской слабости (28.03.2017). The metaphor portrays Crimea as an unlawful acquisition by Russia, serving as a symbol of its audacity. The pro-Ukrainian narrative strongly asserts the illegality of the annexation of Crimea.

4. “Crimea is not a gift”: Для того чтобы понять, что движет Россией в ее нынешних притязаниях на Крым, необходимо вспомнить не только как Крым попал в состав Украины – был “подарен” Украине в 1954 году тогдашним руководством СССР, – но и в каком историческом контексте это происходило. Например, необходимо вспомнить, почему это произошло именно в 1954 году, и какую символическую нагрузку нес этот “подарок” (05.03.2014). The quotation marks around the word “gift” in the given examples are used to negate the metaphor “Crimea is a gift.” According to the metaphorical construct, Crimea is and always has been an intrinsic part of Ukraine's territory. The pro-Russian narrative “Crimea is a gift” is being used by Russians to justify the annexation. However, the pro-Ukrainian narrative “Crimea is not a gift” refutes the idea that Crimea was ever genuinely gifted to Ukraine. It insinuates that the pro-Russian narrative was used tactically to make further territorial expansion of Ukraine possible. The pro-Ukrainian narrative maintains that Crimea is an integral part of Ukraine and it's essential to recognize the strategic positioning of Crimea in the region. Retaining Crimea within Ukraine's borders is of utmost importance.

5. “Crimea is a ship” and, according to the logic of metonymy, «Crimea is an anchor chain»: Именно 2014-ый год стал для российской журналистики часом Х, этической развилкой, когда нужно было выбирать: или ты за объективную истину и высокие стандарты журналистики, или ты за “возвращение Крыма в родную гавань” (21.05.2019); Крым долгое время служил якорной цепью, которая удерживала украинский корабль у российского пирса, но три года назад Москва сама решила спрятать эту якорную цепь в свои закрома (13.01.2017). The
metaphor of Crimea as a ship seized by Russia has been used to describe the annexation of the region, with the associated metonymy highlighting the deceitfulness of the act. In particular, a pro-Ukrainian narrative emphasizes the treacherous nature of the annexation, portraying the event as a covert seizure of a sovereign territory.

6. “Crimea is a scarecrow”: В результаті Крим абсолютно незаслужено стається таким себе всеукраїнським пугалом, которое с удовольствием используют в своих целях по обе стороны баррикад (24.02.2014). The metaphor employed to describe Crimea depicts it as a scarecrow, which symbolizes a deterrent or threat. From a pro-Ukrainian perspective, Crimea is a crucial part of Ukraine’s territory, and its retrieval is of utmost importance.

The research shows that conceptual metaphors with the target domain “Crimea” used in Ukrainian online discourse between 2014 and 2020 supported pro-Ukrainian position. Specifically, these metaphors reinforced the following narratives: firstly, that the annexation of Crimea was part of Russia’s larger plan to take control over Ukraine; secondly, that the illegal annexation of Crimea was a backward step towards Soviet-era policies; and thirdly, that Crimea had been taken unlawfully and must be returned.

One of the main reasons for the annexation of Crimea, as expressed in online news coverage between 2014 and 2020, is a pro-Ukrainian perspective. This perspective argues that Russia took Crimea unlawfully to gain more control over Ukrainian territories.

The examined media discourse prominently features pro-Ukrainian narratives that emphasize how the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula was seen as a result of Russia’s aggressive policies right from the start. These narratives also highlight the Ukrainian people’s willingness to reclaim their lost territories and their bravery in resisting what they deemed as bold encroachments by the Russian government, starting as early as 2014.

References: