

# Psycholinguistic Aspects of Representing Aggression in Wartime Media Discourse

Liudmyla Kovalchuk <sup>a,\*</sup>, Yuliia Litkovych <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University, Ukraine*

*Received August 14, 2022; Revised September 23, 2022; Accepted October 4, 2022*

**Abstract.** The article focuses on aggression caused by the Russian-Ukrainian war as a vivid phenomenon in media discourse. The paper reveals the psychological aspects of this phenomenon, the reasons for the use of verbal aggression, its forms, and its impact on recipients. The research also explores lexical and stylistic means of representing aggression in the Ukrainian media discourse: online publications in periodicals and posts on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. It has been identified that the frequently used invective vocabulary and creolized memes in the media are specific verbal and nonverbal means of psychological liberation from aggression and destructive influence on the target audience. Based on the results of a survey involving 100 respondents from different regions of Ukraine, 50 of whom were male and 50 female, it was found that aggression serves to expose such dominant negative emotions evoked by the Russian-Ukrainian war as anger and hatred. However, the object of aggression of the people surveyed is strikingly different: for 58% of men it's the Russian president, while for 52% of women – the Russian troops. When asked about the most common forms of aggression, the majority of the respondents claimed that it is expressed by mockery, curses and obscenity. The survey documented the use of the corresponding war-related emotionally charged vocabulary, including neologisms with various word-building patterns and newly formed set phrases, by both females and males to express their aggression verbally. Additionally, the participants of the survey confirmed that creolized memes are effective functional tools with nearly equally distributed percentage of protesting against the war, ridiculing invaders and resisting the Russian propaganda.

**Keywords:** *aggression, wartime media discourse, verbal means, nonverbal means, creolized memes.*

**Ковальчук Людмила, Літкович Юлія. Психолінгвістичні аспекти репрезентації агресії у медіадискурсі воєнного часу.**

**Анотація.** Стаття присвячена агресії, спричиненій російсько-українською війною, як яскравому феномену в медіадискурсі. У роботі розкрито психологічний аспект цього явища, причини застосування вербальної агресії, її форми та вплив на реципієнтів. Також досліджено лексичні та стилістичні засоби репрезентації агресії в українському медіадискурсі, а саме: онлайн-публікаціях у періодичних виданнях і дописах у соціальних мережах, таких як «Фейсбук», «Твіттер» та «Інстаграм». Встановлено, що часто вживана в медіа інвективна лексика та креолізовані меми належать до арсеналу специфічних вербальних та невербальних засобів психологічного звільнення від агресії та деструктивного впливу на цільову аудиторію. За результатами опитування 100 респондентів із різних регіонів України, 50 з яких особи чоловічої статі і 50 жіночої, виявлено, що агресія слугує вираженню таких домінуючих негативних емоцій, викликаних російсько-українською війною, як злість та ненависть. Однак, об'єкт агресії

\* Corresponding author. Liudmyla Kovalchuk,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4531-1326>, E-mail: [kovalchuk.liudmyla@vnu.edu.ua](mailto:kovalchuk.liudmyla@vnu.edu.ua)

© Kovalchuk, Liudmyla; Litkovych, Yuliia, 2022. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>). *East European Journal of Psycholinguistics*, 9(2), 67–81. <https://doi.org/10.29038/eejpl.2022.9.2.kov>

опитаних різюче різняться: для 58% чоловіків це президент Росії, в той час як для 52% жінок – російські війська. Для більшості респондентів найпоширенішими формами прояву агресії є насмішка, лайка та прокльон. Опитування засвідчило, що для вербалізації агресії як жінки, так і чоловіки використовують відповідні емоційно забарвлені лексичні одиниці, у тому числі неологізми різної словотвірної приналежності та крилаті вислови, що виникли в період війни. Окрім цього, учасники опитування підтвердили, що креолізовані меми є майже однаково ефективними у відсотковому співвідношенні функційними інструментами протесту проти війни, висміювання окупантів та протидії російській пропаганді.

*Ключові слова:* агресія, медіадискурс воєнного часу, вербальні засоби, невербальні засоби, креолізовані меми.

## Introduction

The present-day study of media discourse provides deep insight into the realm of human emotions. The media can directly influence human consciousness due to the knowledge of human psychology, using language rules and manipulative potential of a language. Naturally, in recent decades there has been a boom of studies devoted to media psychology and verbalization of various emotional states within the media. The multiperspectivity of the study is presented by the works of such prominent scholars as Infante (1987), Giles (2003), Harris (1999), Kirschner & Kirschner (1997), Wallace (1999), Fairclough (1995).

Wartime has always been associated with people's emotional instability, or so-called emotional swings, when anxiety, anger and hatred are temporarily substituted by apathy or euphoria leading to war adaptation. Negative emotions triggered by the war mostly evoke aggression intended to harm the social relations of individuals or groups from the hostile parties.

Such a resonant event as Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 has led to a rapid escalation of verbal aggression by Ukrainians towards Russians especially within the media space, where the information war had started long before the military actions took place. In the intensive information flow the Russian propaganda tried to distort a picture of the real situation by means of jugglery and spreading fakes or deep fakes.

In this context verbal aggression has become an effective tool of resisting the information war and the Russian military invasion in its broadest sense. On the one hand, aggression displaces speech tolerance and spreads at a very fast pace in the information space. On the other hand, it can take a variety of forms and be communicated verbally or/and nonverbally thus providing psychological liberation from negative emotions.

Nonverbal aggression is represented by graphic elements, or so-called memes (ideas, images, objects of culture adopted by many members of the community). Creolized memes form a unity of two inhomogeneous (verbal and nonverbal) constituents, reflecting and intensifying the inevitable response to current events and making destructive influence on the target audience.

## Method

Our integrated psycholinguistic study of representing aggression in wartime media discourse involved the application of two analytical methods: 1) a corpus/text analysis of the vocabulary and creolized memes and 2) an empirical survey.

First, we analyzed the invective vocabulary and creolized memes appearing in the Ukrainian media space. We used a method of continuous sampling to assemble a list of both verbal and nonverbal means for expressing aggression in media texts as observed in real discourse. Having analyzed the collected 116 examples of invective vocabulary (neologisms and recontextualized existing words) we differentiated two types of verbal means representing aggression: lexical and stylistic. We classified the invective lexical means according to various criteria: part-of-speech affiliation (mainly verbs and nouns), word-building patterns (affixation, composition, blending, shortening), the object (Russian president, Russian troops, zombified Russians, Russia, countries hesitantly/not supporting Ukraine) and the form (humiliation, curse, obscenity, mockery) of aggression. On the basis of a detailed factual material analysis we singled out different stylistic means of representing aggression used in the media: pejorative grammar, metaphorical antonomasia, euphemisms, periphrasis. Then we systematized and interpreted the creolized memes appearing in the Ukrainian media discourse after February 24, 2022 and distinguished three main targeted messages: deteriorating Russia's status, weakening the image of the Russian president and the Russian military, criticizing NATO and the European Union.

Second, in order to shed light on the psycholinguistic specificity of aggression we conducted an empirical survey with 100 respondents from different regions of Ukraine, 50 of whom were male and 50 female. The exact period of the survey was 20.04.2022 – 20.05.2022. We designed an online questionnaire and advertised it by Viber, Telegram, and corporate mail of the university. The online questionnaire consisted of six closed-ended questions with predetermined options for the respondents to choose from:

Q 1: What are your dominant negative emotions evoked by the Russian-Ukrainian war?

Q 2: Who is the object of your aggression during the war?

Q 3: What are the typical forms of your verbal aggression at wartime?

Q 4: Which group of words do you usually use to discharge aggression?

Q 5: What is your favourite war-related set phrase?

Q 6: In your opinion, what is the function of war-related creolized memes?

Then we processed the collected data automatically by built-in tools of the questionnaire and interpreted the obtained results (for more details see the Discussion and Conclusions section, Table 1).

Verbal aggression as a psycholinguistic phenomenon is viewed as the use of verbal and nonverbal means contradicting the institutional and situational norms of communication to cause psychological harm to the communicative position and self-concept of other people (Krasnobaieva-Chorna, 2021, p. 276). In this context it's

necessary to draw a distinction between verbal aggression, the act of using aggressive language, and verbal aggressiveness, a person's attitude towards using aggressive language (Levine, Beatty, & Limon, 2004).

Generally, verbal aggression is triggered by negative life events accompanied by the accumulation of negative emotions like anxiety, fear, anger, hatred, etc. From this perspective, an example of a disturbing event of the present time is Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, i.e. the so-called hybrid war containing at least two types of confrontation – military and informational ones. The information war is a destructive form of verbal interaction as it presupposes establishing control over people's thoughts, consciousness, ideological benchmarks, the processes of perceiving information in a non-military way and manipulating others through language (Krylova-Grek, 2018, p. 180).

On the one hand, aggressive language, with its tendency to reverberate over social media, harms society individually and collectively. Between cultures, verbal aggression can spiral out of control, leading to bloodshed or even full-scale war. In short, the incendiary effect of excessive verbal aggression represents an imminent danger to civilized society (Hamilton, 2012, p. 6). On the other hand, in case of the Ukraine's resistance to Russia's invasion, verbal aggression contributes to general protesting against the war and provides psychological liberation from negative emotions.

## Results

### Lexical Means of Representing Aggression

On the basis of continuous sampling from different illustrative sources (online publications in such periodicals as *Ukrainska Pradva*, *Holos Ukrainy*, *Den'/The Day*, and *Unian* as well as posts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) we observed various means of verbal aggression that turned out to be extremely powerful elements of emotionally charged media texts. In general, in the current virtualized communicative space there coexist two major trends: 1) the appearance of war-related neologisms and 2) the reintroduction of already existing words with updated meanings.

Like any new phenomenon, the Russian-Ukrainian war has given rise to the emergence of newly formed words and set phrases for verbalization of people's aggression towards the surrounding reality. Buket (2022), a journalist of the Information Agency of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine – ArmyInform, has compiled a glossary of war-related neologisms and made it public at the official website of ArmyInform. The glossary doesn't claim to be exhaustive as it encounters around 50 war-related neologisms that are constantly either appearing or going out of use. The newly formed vocabulary encompasses a great number of lexical units belonging to different parts of speech, mainly verbs and nouns.

1. The most numerous group of neologisms is represented by the verbs originated from proper names and nouns denoting different types of military weapons: *зукраїнути*

'*zukrainyty*' – be ukrained (humiliate on the global level when someone invades Ukraine); *макронити* '*makronyty*' – look deeply concerned and worried but not to provide real help (like the French president Emmanuell Macron); *шойгувати* '*shoiguvaty*' – pretend at one's working place that everything is going according to the plan (like the Russian Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu); *джавелінити* '*dzhavelinyty*', *байрактарити* '*bairaktaryty*', *хімарсити* '*himarsyty*', *стінгерити* '*stingeryty*' – destroy the enemy (modern weapons Javelin, Bayraktar, Himars, Stinger used by Ukrainian soldiers); *чорнобаїти* '*chornobaity*' – suffer from ineffectiveness by making the same mistake (Ukrainian village Chornobaivka where Russian troops were destroyed more than 10 times); *відірпенити* '*vidirpenyty*', *нагостомелити* '*nahostomelyty*' – resist the enemy (Ukrainian hero cities Irpin and Hostomel where fierce battles took place).

2. The following nouns also make up a group of newly formed war-related neologisms: *дебахнулько* '*debakhnulko*' – someone who can do much harm because of excessive curiosity and concern; *рашизм* (*ruscism*) – Russian fascism; *натівець* '*nativets*' – someone who doesn't keep promises (NATO as a military alliance refuses to impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine not to be involved in the military confrontation with Russia); *аналоговнет* '*analogovnet*' (something created in Russia), *затрудні* '*zatrydni*' – unrealistic plans (Russia's failed "Blitzkrieg" in Ukraine).

On the other hand, a lot of already existing words were recontextualized during wartime, thus testifying to the enormous potential of language resources: *їжак* (*hedgehog*) – a spiky-looking steel obstacle that can divert or delay Russian tanks; *коктейль Молотова / Бандера-смузи* (*Molotov cocktail / Bandera smoothie*) – a homemade weapon (a mixture of a casing, fuel, and a wick) named after the Ukrainian nationalist S. Bandera; *бандеромобіль* '*banderomobil*' – a combat vehicle of the Armed Forces of Ukraine; *привид Києва* (*ghost of Kyiv*) – a collective image of Ukrainian pilots who appear unexpectedly to protect the capital's sky); *бавовна* (*cotton*) – explosion in Russia. The word *troops* borrowed from English into Ukrainian in its transliterated version '*трупс*' possesses the negative meaning of *corps*.

Depending upon word-building patterns we selected lexical units formed by means of:

1) affixation: *путіністи* (*putinists*), *пропагандисти* (*propagandists*), *депутінізація* (*deputinization*), *денацифікація* (*denazification*), *дерусифікація* (*derussification*);

2) composition: *z-монстри* (*z-monsters*), *свинособаки* (*pig-dogs*), *країна-терорист* (*terroriststate*), *Бандера-смузи* (*Bandera smoothie*), *затрудні* (*forthreedays*);

3) blending: *Путлер* (*Путін+Гітлер*) – *Putler* (*Putin+Hilter*), *рашисти* (*російські+фашисти*) – *ruscists* (*Russian+fascists*), *бульбофюрер* (*бульбаиш+фюрер*) – *bulbofuhrrer* (*bulbash+fuhrrer*);

4) shortening: *Пу* (*Путін*) – *Pu* (*Putin*).

On the whole, the manifestation of aggression in periodicals and social media is mostly realized with a help of invectives – non-standard (non-literary) vocabulary

referred to in linguistics as low colloquialisms, jargonisms, slang, vulgarisms; pejorative, negatively coloured, insulting, obscene, scornful, taboo words that contain a seme of insult in their component structure (Mezhov, Navalna, & Kostusiak, 2020, p. 99).

Thus on the basis of a detailed factual material analysis we classified the invectives in accordance with two criteria: 1) the object of aggression; 2) the form of aggression.

1. Taking into account the object of verbal aggression we identified the following groups of lexical units for nominating:

a) Russian president V. Putin: *Путлер (Putler), Пу (Pu), хуйло (khuilo), пуйло (puilo), бункерний щур (bunker rat), шизофренік (schizophrenic), параноїдальний психопат (paranoid psychopath), садист (sadist), тиран (tyrant), кривавий диктатор (bloody dictator), російський фюрер (Russian fuhrer), потвора (monster), скотина (beast), чорт (devil), чмо (shmuick), лайно (shit);*

b) Russian troops: *орки (orcs), русня (rusnia), рашисти (ruscists), нацисти (nazis), мрази (scums), варвари (barbarians), мародери (looters), вбивці (murderers), кати (executioners), терористи (terrorists), свинособаки (pig-dogs), виродки (bastards), збоченці (perverts), твалтівники (rapists), біологічне сміття (biological waste), чмоні (chumps);*

c) zombified Russians: *путіністи (putinists), пропагандисти (propagandists), зазомбоване стадо (zombie herd), зомбонація (zombie nation), плем'я з промитими мізками (brainwashed tribe);*

d) Russia: *путінія (putinia), оркостан (orcoston), педерація (pederazia), мордор (mordor), держава-терорист (terrorist state);*

e) countries hesitantly/not supporting Ukraine: *макроніти (macronuty), натівець (nativets), бульбофюрер (bulbofuhrer – Belarusian president Aleksandr Lukashenko), бульбаші (bulbashi – Belarusians), деруни (deruny – Belarusians).*

2. With respect to the form of verbal aggression we singled out the following emotionally loaded set phrases used for humiliating, cursing and mocking everyone supporting the Russian full-scale invasion:

a) humiliation: *Ласкаво просимо до пекла! (Welcome to the hell!); Смерть ворогам! (Death to the enemies!); Покладіть насіння в кишені, щоб соняшники після смерті проросли (Put sunflower seeds in your pockets so that they will grow after you die) – a statement of extreme disgust towards Russian invaders pronounced by a brave Ukrainian woman;*

b) curse and obscenity: *Будьте прокляті, рашисти! (Be damned, ruscists!); Рускій ваєнний карабль, іди на х\*й! (Russian warship, go fuck yourself! / Russian warship, fuck your ass!) – the last communication by a border guard R. Hrybov to the Russian missile cruiser Moskva made during the Russian attack on Snake Island;*

c) mockery: *Увага! Повітряна тривога! Всі в Мавзолей! (Warning! Air alarm! Everyone to the Mausoleum! (Mausoleum – a burial chamber of a deceased person or people); Квиток на прощальний концерт Кобзона (A ticket for Kobzon farewell concert) – physical destruction of the Russian invaders by joining the deceased singer Kobzon; Путін хуйло (Putin khuilo) – a widespread slogan for condemning and poking*

fun at the Russian president originated in 2014 from a football chant performed by FC Metalist Kharkiv and Shakhtar Donetsk.

### Stylistic Means of Representing Aggression

In our opinion, stylistic means of expressing aggression are much more frequently used on social media than in periodicals due to the anonymous verbal interaction or the pseudonym which is often used by authors, as well as the absence of the appropriate response to norm violation.

1. Pejorative grammar as a derogatory graphical means of expressing aggression presupposes the use of decapitalized proper nouns (Buket, 2022): *путін (putin)*, *росія (russia)*, *rf (russian federation)*, *москва (moscow)*, *кремль (kremlin)*.

2. Metaphorical antonomasia is based on the use of names of historical, literary or biblical personages for a person whose characteristic features make him similar to the well-known originals. According to the norms of the Ukrainian language such names are also decapitalized: *зімлер (hitler)*, *фюрер (fuhrer)* – killer of the century (Putin), *сатана (satan)* – absolute evil, people's instigator to commit sin (Putin), *мордор (mordor)* – terrorist state (Russia), *орки (orcs)* – looters and murderers (Russian troops) from *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien. This stylistic device also works in the opposite direction: *Бункерний Щур (Bunker Rat)* – V. Putin, *Кобляча Голова (Mare's Head)* – S. Lavrov, *Зливний Бачок (Drain Tank)* – O. Skabeeva, *Бензоколонка (Oil Station)* – Russia.

3. Euphemisms as substitutions of less offensive expressions for expressions suggesting something unpleasant: *негативно народитись (be negatively born)* – die, *завохосятими 'zadvokhsotyty'* – destroy / kill the enemy, *затр'яохсятими 'zatriokhsotyty'* – wound the enemy, *іхтамнієтими 'ikhtamnietyty'* – neutralize the enemy, *пуйло 'puilo'* – хуйло 'khuilo' (Putin).

4. Periphrasis consists in using roundabout forms of expression instead of simpler ones and conveys individual perception of objects based on their foregrounded important features or qualities: *за поребриком 'za porebrykom'* – in Russia, *завести трактор (start the tractor)* – apply unexpected methods of fighting, *йти за російським кораблем (follow the Russian warship)* – fail, *дискотека (disco party)* – military actions, *термоточка (thermal point)* – fire; *хлопець з ядерною зброєю (guy with nuclear weapon)* – V. Putin, *друзі Путіна (Putin's friends)* – Russian troops.

### Aggression in Creolized Memes

War-time media discourse uses not only verbal means, but often introduces graphic elements for representing aggression. The linguists define creolized text or meme as: a) a special kind of text which consists of two inhomogeneous components (verbal and nonverbal); b) verbal and nonverbal components aimed at a complex pragmatic impact on the recipient (Adler-Nissen, Andersen, & Hansen, 2019, p. 75-95).

Since the beginning of the Kremlin's military attack Ukraine's periodicals and social media are full of the creolized memes highlighting the brutalities Russia is inflicting upon the country. Due to extreme popularity and worldwide sharing within the media space their verbal component was immediately translated into English. Having analyzed the illustrative sources, we distinguished the following targeted messages of the creolized memes: significant deteriorating Russia's status in the international arena, weakening the image of both the Russian president V. Putin and the Russian military, as well as lambasting NATO and the European Union for not providing enough help for Ukraine.

Figure 1 vividly shows Russia's full-scale invasion by means of foregrounding the Russian national symbol matrioshka which is much bigger in size than the destroyed territory of Ukraine thus calling on the whole world to react to the enormous scale of the Ukrainian people's suffering and to recognize Russia as a terrorist state (TERRORUSSIA).

Figure 1  
*Russia – a Terrorist State* (Facebook, 12.06.2022)



Fig. 2 presents a strong message of opposing the Ukrainian president V. Zelenskyi (HERO) wearing a bulletproof vest who has already become a real political defender for the Ukrainian people by doing his best to resist the military confrontation to the Russian leader V. Putin (ZERO), a cruel dictator, sitting in his bunker and justifying Russian's war against Ukraine.

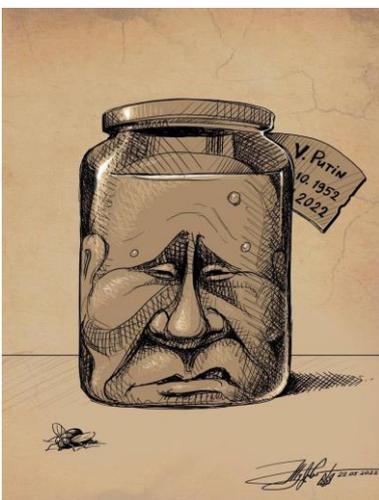
Figure 2  
*V. Zelenskyi vs V. Putin* (Twitter, 01.03.2022)



A great number of war-related creolized memes apply humour as an effective tool of resisting the information war. On the one hand, it can bring people together and allow them to blow off tension of everyday life. On the other hand, when a society experiences distressing events, satire and dark humor can help people counter feelings of powerlessness and grief. Humor can persuade the public that repressive tactics are hilarious and excessive (Dziubina, 2016).

As we may see, Fig. 3 demonstrates mocking V. Putin who is depicted as already dead in 2022, with his head preserved in a glass jar. Such a creolized meme vividly expresses a common desire of all Ukrainians to see Putin's death as soon as possible and makes people smile serving as a form of encouragement not to be defeated.

Figure 3  
*V. Putin's Death* (Facebook, 25.05.2022)



The well-known set phrase “Russian warship, go fuck yourself” originally spoken in Russian that has become a rallying cry for Ukraine’s defenders in protests and demonstrations around the world and the most favourite creolized memes was finally immortalized on a postal stamp. Fig. 4 highlights a view of a Ukrainian soldier giving the middle finger to a Russian warship moving closer. The stamp is a masterful public image campaign boosting the national fortitude.

Figure 4  
*Russian Warship* (Twitter, 16.03.22)



Fig. 5 displays weakening the image of the Russian military. Andrii Riazantsev, a Russian occupier, who surrendered to the Ukrainian military, has become a new Internet meme. He was even given the nickname Chmonia (looser or chump). The audience created humorous videos with the invader and ridiculed the soldier’s awkward appearance as a representative of “the second army of the world” with under-equipped troops lacking supplies and showing low morale.

Figure 5  
*Chmonia* (Unian, 29.03.2022)



Humor as a form of aggressive expression is also a counter-propaganda tool that provides a different interpretation to the main narrative, weakening the propagandist's message. Britain used satirical radio programs to reach ordinary German people during World War II. Today images of periodicals and social media give modern information warfare a visual twist (Bleiker, 2018).

Multiple reports state that the Russian troops came to Ukraine not only to “save and liberate” but also to steal money, jewelry, clothes, rugs, kettles, washing machines, etc. Consequently, the key element of a great number of the present-day creolized memes is a washing machine. Fig. 6 vividly shows ironic ridiculing of the Russian invaders demonstrating the stolen washing machines attached to the helicopters as their “major trophies” during the military parade in Moscow on Victory Day.

Figure 6

*Washing Machines at the Military Parade* (Facebook, 08.04.2022)

**RUSSIAN MILITARY PARADE 2022**



Fig. 7 illustrates a meme that lambasts NATO for not closing the sky and providing enough help for Ukraine by means of a snapshot of a film star Mel Gibson sitting next to Jesus Christ in his 2005 “The Passion of the Christ” drama – barefoot, dressed in a tunic dipped in blood, with a crown of thorns on his head as a symbol of long-suffering Ukraine.

Figure 7

*NATO is Against a No-Fly Zone over Ukraine* (Instagram, 10.03.2022)



Irony, satire and cynicism in memes help Ukrainian people cope with stress, damage, uncertainty and brutality around them. Memes are an outlet for releasing excessive aggression so that Ukrainians are not engulfed in horror, a psychological defense mechanism so that a person doesn't get too affected by the sight of flesh, blood and so on (Maddox, 2022).

Thus the creolized memes are integral verbal and nonverbal media communication devices that help people shape and share important narratives, boost morale, and reflect upon the new reality and experiences for the sake of protesting against the war and ridiculing invaders.

## Discussion

In order to provide a more profound understanding of the reasons of aggression, its typical forms, verbal and nonverbal means of representation in wartime media discourse we conducted a survey. An online questionnaire included six closed-ended questions presented in the table below, along with the respondents' replies to these questions (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Survey questions and results obtained from the respondents' replies*

Q 1 What are your dominant negative emotions evoked by the Russo-Ukrainian war?			
Females		Males	
18%	anxiety	16%	anxiety
18%	fear	8%	fear
26%	anger	31%	anger
36%	hatred	42%	hatred
2%	apathy	3%	apathy
Q 2 Who is the object of your aggression during the war?			
Females		Males	
28%	Russian president V. Putin	58%	Russian president V. Putin
5%	Russian troops	30%	Russian troops
16%	zombified Russians	8%	zombified Russians
3%	Russia	2%	Russia
1%	countries hesitantly/not supporting Ukraine	2%	countries hesitantly/not supporting Ukraine
Q 3 What are the typical forms of your verbal aggression at wartime?			
Females		Males	
2%	threat	2%	threat
1%	humiliation	12%	humiliation
22%	curse	25%	curse
14%	mockery	20%	mockery
52%	obscenity	39%	obscenity

Q 4 Which group of words do you usually use to discharge aggression?

Females	Males
28% Putler, Pu, khuilo, puilo, bunker rat, schizophrenic, paranoid psychopath, sadist, shit	51% Putler, Pu, khuilo, puilo, bunker rat, schizophrenic, paranoid psychopath, sadist, shit
60% orcs, ruscists, looters, pig-dogs, z-monsters, bastards, perverts, biological waste	37% orcs, ruscists, looters, pig-dogs, z-monsters, bastards, perverts, biological waste
9% putinists, propagandists, zombie herd, brainwashed tribe	8% putinists, propagandists, zombie herd, brainwashed tribe
2% putinia, orcostan, rf, pederazia, ruzzia, mordor, terrorist state	2% putinia, orcostan, rf, pederazia, ruzzia, mordor, terrorist state
1% macronyty, nativets, bulbofuhner, bulbashi, deruny	2% macronyty, nativets, bulbofuhner, bulbashi, deruny

Q 5 What is your favourite war-related set phrase?

Females	Males
68% Russian warship, go fuck yourself!	42% Russian warship, go fuck yourself!
16% Put sunflower seeds in your pockets so that they will grow after you die.	11% Put sunflower seeds in your pockets so that they will grow after you die.
8% A ticket for Kobzon farewell concert.	16% A ticket for Kobzon farewell concert.
8% Putin – khuilo!	31% Putin – khuilo!

Q 6 In your opinion, what is the function of war-related creolized memes?

Females	Males
36% protest against the war	34% protest against the war
33% mockery of invaders	34% mockery of invaders
31% resistance to Russian propaganda	32% resistance to Russian propaganda

## Discussion and Conclusions

Having analyzed the respondents' replies, we came to the conclusion that verbal aggression at wartime is mainly evoked by such prevailing negative emotions as anger (for 26% of females and 31% of males) and hatred (for 36% of females and 42% of males). Differences to Q1 did not vary by gender ( $p=.12$ ). However, the survey demonstrated a striking difference regarding the object of aggression: 58 % of men defined it as the Russian president V. Putin, whereas 52% of women – the Russian troops. Indeed, there was a significant difference in pattern of responding on Q2 ( $p=.0004$ ). With respect to the forms of verbal aggression, the most frequent ones are mockery, curse and obscenity. The responses of females and males demonstrated the use of the corresponding emotionally loaded vocabulary to discharge aggression directed towards their objects. No sex differences were observed on Q3 ( $p=.49$ ). For the majority

of women (60%) the verbalization of aggression is realized by lexical units nominating the Russian troops (*orcs, ruscists, looters, pig dogs, z-monsters, bastards, perverts, biological waste*), while for most men (51%) – the Russian president V. Putin (*Putler, Pu, khuilo, puilo, bunker rat, schizophrenic, paranoid psychopath, sadist, shit*). Indeed, the pattern of responding on Q4 showed a significant gender difference ( $p=.01$ ). Naturally, the most favourite war-related set phrase for the respondents of both sexes is “*Russian warship, go fuck yourself*”. Nonetheless, there was a significant gender difference in the pattern of responding on Q5 ( $p=.0002$ ). The last question was designed to clarify the role of a great variety of the creolized memes in wartime media discourse. The survey results demonstrated that the representatives of both sexes distributed the functional potential of memes as protesting against the war, ridiculing invaders and resisting Russian propaganda with nearly equal percentage (more than 30% for each function) that serves to express aggression both verbally and nonverbally in wartime media discourse. No gender difference was observed ( $p=.96$ ).

The results of the study testify to the strong tendency of applying aggression as an effective tool of the information war in the Ukrainian media discourse. Attention has been focused on the specific arsenal of representing aggression both verbally and nonverbally. Among verbal means we differentiated lexical (war-related neologisms and words with updated meanings) and stylistic (pejorative grammar, metaphorical antonomasia, euphemisms, and periphrasis) resources. We singled out the invectives (negatively charged words and set phrases) in accordance with two criteria: the object of aggression (Russian president, Russian troops, zombified Russians, Russia, countries hesitantly/not supporting Ukraine) and the form of aggression (humiliation, curse, obscenity, mockery). Besides, the most vivid examples of the creolized memes combining verbal and nonverbal components made it possible to assert that they record the lived experience of the Ukrainian citizens fighting and fearing for their lives at wartime. Being impolite, aggressive and even humorous, the creolized memes establish a narrative framework for the target audience to know how to think and feel about Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and possess the powerful functional potential of protesting against the war and ridiculing the Russian invaders.

To conclude, our survey demonstrated that the contemporary frequent use of the emotionally loaded invective vocabulary and creolized memes within the media space assists in resisting the informational confrontation and contributes to the liberation from aggression triggered by the Russian-Ukrainian war for the sake of psychological balance.

## References

- Adler-Nissen, R., Andersen, K. E., & Hansen, L. (2020). Images, emotions, and international politics: The death of Alan Kurdi. *Review of International Studies*, 46(1), 75–95.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210519000317>
- Bleiker, R. (2018). Mapping visual global politics. In R. Bleiker, (Ed.). *Visual Global Politics*. (pp. 1-29). New York: Routledge,

- Dziubina, O. I. (2016). Klasyfikatsiia, struktura ta funktsionuvannia Internet-memiv v sotsialnykh merezhakh Twitter ta Facebook [Classification, structure and functioning of Internet memes on social networks Twitter and Facebook]. *Molodyi Vchenyi*, 2, 375–379.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media Discourse*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Giles, D. (2003). *Media Psychology*. Mahwah, New Jersey, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hamilton, M. A. (2012). Verbal aggression: Understanding the psychological antecedents and social consequences. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 31(1), 5–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X11425032>
- Harris, R. J. (1999). *A Cognitive Psychology of Mass Communication* (3rd ed.). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Infante, D. A. (1987). Aggressiveness. In J. C. McCroskey, & J. A. Daly, (Eds.). *Personality and Interpersonal Communication* (pp. 157-192). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Kirschner, S., & Kirschner, D. A. (1997). *Perspectives on Psychology and the Media*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Kovalchuk, L., & Litkovych, Yu. (2022). Verbalization of Aggression in Wartime Media Discourse. Data. Retrieved from <https://osf.io/b8tdf>
- Krasnobaieva-Chorna, Zh. (2021). Typolohiia verbalnoi ahresii prof. Dominika A. Infante: sprobha frazemnoi adaptatsii [Typology of verbal aggression of prof. Dominic A. Infante: An attempt to phrasemics adaptation]. *Zapysky z Ukrainskoho Movoznavstva. Suhestyvna Linhvistyka. Komunikatyvna Linhvistyka*, 28, 275-283. <https://doi.org/10.18524/2414-0627.2021.28.235553>
- Krylova-Grek, Yu. (2018). Psycholinguistic aspects of the semantic field of the concept “war” in modern media space. *Psycholinguistics*, 23(1), 175-188. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1211561>
- Levine, T. R., Beatty, M. J., & Limon, S. (2004). The dimensionality of the verbal aggressiveness scale. *Communication Monographs*, 71, 245-265.
- Maddox, J. (2022). Ukraine’s official Twitter handle is processing the nation’s trauma in real time with memes. Retrieved from <https://scroll.in/article/1019262/ukraines-twitter-handle-is-processing-the-nations-trauma-real-time-with-memes>
- Mezhov, O., Navalna, M., & Kostusiak M. (2020). Invective vocabulary in media discourse of the beginning of the 21st century: a psycholinguistic aspect. *East European Journal of Psycholinguistics*, 7(1), 97–110. <https://doi.org/10.29038/eejpl.2020.7.1.mez>
- Wallace, P. (1999). *The Psychology of the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## Sources

- Buket, Ye. (2022). *ArmiiaInform predstavliaie slovnyk neolohizmiv ukrainskoi movy* [ArmyInform presents a dictionary of neologisms of the Ukrainian language]. Retrieved from <https://armyinform.com.ua/2022/07/20/armiyainform-predstavlyaye-slovnyk-neologizmiv-ukrayinskoyi-movy/>
- Buket, Ye. (2022). *Znevazhlyva hramatyka viiny: vlasni nazvy ta imena ahresora pyshemo z maloi lityry* [Derogatory grammar of war: decapitalized proper names and aggressor names]. Retrieved from <https://armyinform.com.ua/2022/03/16/znevazhlyva-gramatyka-vijny-vlasni-nazvy-ta-imena-agresora-lyshe-z-maloyi-lityry/>
- Den’/The Day. (2022). <https://day.kyiv.ua/uk>
- Golos Ukrainy. (2022). Retrieved from <http://www.golos.com.ua>
- Ukrainska Pradva. (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.pravda.com.ua>
- Facebook. (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com>
- Instagram. (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com>
- Twitter. (2022). Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/ukraine>
- Unian. (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.unian.ua>