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Oksana Zhuravska

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University
Levka Lukianenka str., 13-B, Kyiv, 04212, Ukraine
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4623-8933>
o.zhuravska@kubg.edu.ua

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

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 nature and discourse of this meme..

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

Introduction. Media contexts are elements of cyber or digital culture, the study of which is also of considerable scientific interest, as a new stage in the development of information culture.

It is believed that cyberculture enforces and intensifies globalization processes through the blurring of borders — national, cultural and so on. In particular, these processes affect the work of mass media. First of all, it is said that “in today’s hybrid information environment, the boundaries between what constitutes journalism and what does not are blurred” (Wunderlich, 2022). In addition, we can talk about the blurring of the genre framework of journalistic works and the transformation of the genre system, as well as updating the principles of editorial offices (multimedia, convergence, cross-media, etc.) and the results of this work, i. e. the final information product.

The dialogic nature of cyberculture poses a potential threat, as the increasing amount of information reduces the quality of its supply and the level of consumer culture. The fact that the media space is becoming a platform not only for creation and creativity, but also for the manipulation and use of various tools of information warfare, including the spread of propaganda, fakes, etc., complicates the situation.

Memes as bearers of sociocultural codes of new cyber culture and as an important functionality of current media are an important object for media researches. However, while the strategies of their use in media during times of peace have been studied rather substantially, the crisis situations the mankind has faced lately require additional attention of the researchers.

The purpose of the research is to analyse the symbolic nature and cultural codes of miscellaneous modifications of one of the most wide-spread Ukrainian memes: “the Russian warship meme”, its role in the creation and development of the latest media discourses, as well as specification of tendencies concerning its use in professional journalist publications.

The specified purpose is implemented through performing of a **range of assignments**:

– to summarize information about the kinds of “the Russian warship meme” and the specifics of their use in media environment, particularly, in the professional one, too (author’s media content, news, etc.);

– to determine social- and linguacultural contexts of an obscene expression, symbolized in media environment;

– to analyse the meme’s functionality in the media discourses of heroism, immortality, irony and philology.

The subject of the study is “the Russian warship” meme and a group of its modifications spread in media environment after February 24, 2022.

The object of the research is the tendencies in media culture development in crisis situations and the response of professional media to time challenges.

EXTRALINGUISTIC AND LINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF THE ARISING AND SPREADING “RUSSIAN WARSHIP” MEME

To understand the meaning of the meme one must know the context of its arising, spreading, cultural codes, intertextual connections, etc. Thus, firstly, one should pay attention to two aspects related to “the Russian warship” meme, — the extralinguistic and intralinguistic ones.

Extralinguistic context

Approximately at 11.30 on February 24, 2022, on the first day of the Russian Federation’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, two Russian warships — “Moskva” cruiser and “Vasylii Bykov” patrol corvette came to the Ukrainian island of Zmiinyi (also known as Snake Island or Serpent Island). On radio the Russians demanded from the Ukrainian border guards to turn off their means of communication and to lay down arms. The Ukrainians refused, so the sailors from “Moskva” demanded the same again.

Russian warship: ‘Snake Island, I, Russian warship, repeat the offer: put down your arms and surrender, or you will be bombed. Have you understood me? Do you copy?’

Ukrainian 1: ‘Nu, vsyo. That’s it, then. Or, do we need to fuck them back off?’

Ukrainian 2: ‘Might as well.’

Ukrainian 1: ‘Russian warship, go fuck yourself (*Russkiy voyennyi korabl. Idi nakhuy*).’

After that, according to the data from the State Border Service of Ukraine, artillery from the “Moskva” cruiser and the patrol corvette of “Vasylii

Bykov” launched a massive strike on the island. Then, a Russian strike aircraft SU-24, attacked the island, after which almost no intact building was left on its surface.

In his evening speech, the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi reported that the defenders of the island had died: “On our Zmiinyi Island, all the border guards died as heroes defending it to the last, but did not surrender. All of them will be awarded with a title of Hero of Ukraine posthumously. Memory eternal to those who gave their life for Ukraine” (UT, 25.02.2022).

The Ministry of Defense of the aggressor country informed that 82 military men of the station had surrendered but they would be able to return to their families soon.

An audio recording with the stiff denial of the Ukrainians to surrender started circulating around social networks (RVK). The island and its defenders became a symbol of the invincible country’s spirit: “As early as the beginning of the large-scale war of Russia against Ukraine Zmiinyi Island became a symbol of Ukrainians’ invincibility” (OA, 14.03.2022). At the same time, in media and social networks, the meme of “the Russian warship” and its numerous modifications spread instantly.

On February 26, 2022, a rescuing ship of Sapfir with civilian sailors, military chaplains and a doctor onboard dispatched for evacuation of the Ukrainian sailors considered dead at that time from Zmiinyi Island. The Russians ambushed the humanitarian mission, the crew were captured (RFERL, 08.07.2022).

On February 27, 2022 media shared a video where Georgian sailors refused to help a Russian ship repeating the words of Ukrainian ones (GS).

On April 13, 2022 it became known that the “Moskva” cruiser had been seriously damaged due to shelling. After the ship’s underflooding, its captain who had attacked Zmiinyi Island and threatened the Ukrainian military men had died: “Anton Kuprin, “Moskva” cruiser captain, died after the explosion on it” (F, 15.04.2022).

On August 04, 2022, military-and-naval expert HI Sutton OSINT (open source intelligence) reported that the Russian military ship of 2260 project, “Vasylii Bykov” class, had released a smokescreen. He supposed that masking with smoke did not help it avoid the strike of a Ukrainian rocket. The next day, the ship entered Sevastopol harbor in Crimea occupied by the Russians. Its bow side on the stern had burn marks. However, the ship could not be fully identified because Russia had painted the fleet numbers of all the ships after the beginning of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine (RFERL, 05.08.2022).

According to the official data voiced at the briefing of Iryna Vereshchuk, the Minister of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories, on June 20, 2022, 75 Ukrainian military men from Zmiinyi Island remained captured (RFERL, 20.06.2022). Their condition at the time of the article being written was unknown.

On June 30, 2022 General Valerii Zaluzhnyi, Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, informed about the liberation of Zmiinyi Island. There were established several Ukrainian flags, particularly, one of them was signed by Colonel Maxim Marchenko, the Head of Odesa Military Government: “Remember, “Russian warship”, Zmiinyi Island is Ukraine!!!” (RFERL, 08.07.2022).

Linguistic factors

The basis for different modifications of “the Russian warship” meme is that it’s an expression with an obscene component, which is usually translated into English as “Russian warship, go fuck yourself”. As the audio record (RVK) proves, the Russian and the Ukrainian military men talk in Russian. Thus, the expression is pronounced as *Russkii voyennyi korabl, idi nakhui* in the original language.

The availability of the obscene component in the meme-expression did not narrow the area of its use, in particular, in communication in media and at the official level. But modified options of the expression characterized by down-toned categorical nature due to its shortened form (*Русский военный корабль, иди на...! Русский военный корабль. Иди на х@й! Російський військовий кораблю, іди на...! Російський військовий кораблю, іди...! Russian warship, go f... yourself, etc.*), substitution with euphemisms, for example, *went after the russian ship; sent like the russian ship; go as the russian ship, go after the russian ship, etc.*, began to appear.

The word *khui* is an obscene, rude colloquial polysemantic word. It can mean a male reproductive organ, sexual intercourse, a man with extensive sexual experience, a man as a bearer of negative morals and psychological features, it can be used as a negative participle “NOT”, etc. (Stavycka, 2008).

According to one of the most wide-spread versions, etymologically this word relates to the word of *khvoia* (aceroses) and its Indo-European equivalents (Lith. *skujá* — “acerose”, Latv. *skuja* — “acerose”). The reflex of this word in Albanian is quite notable: *hu* — “stake”, *membrum virile*. Here we can see the same semantic development as in Spanish *carajo* < Greek *χαράκιον*, diminutive of *χαράξ* “stake”.

This word belongs to a group of words united around Indo-European **skēu* “be sharp”, and conformed with a wide-spread semantic model of *a sharp, prickly thing — male virile*. The word is known to many Slavic languages, for example, Polish *chuj*, Slovakian *chuj*, Bulgarian *хуй* (Stavycka, 2008, p. 392).

The literal translation of the expression is *idi* — “go”, *na* — “for”, *khui* — “penis”.

But taking into account that it is a swearing, the relevant correspondence to the word of “*khui*” can be *cock* or *dick*.

This is not the only case of the obscene word of *khui* and its derivatives being used in the Ukrainian media environment, particularly, related to memes. Since the beginning of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, several verbal memes have started to circulate in social networks:

- containing the full form of the obscene expression: *Putin, pishov na khui!* — *Putin, go fuck yourself!* *Putin khui!* — *Putin is a dickhead!*
- as an abbreviation of an obscene expression: *ПТН ПНХ “РТН ПНН”* — derivative from “*ПуТiН, Пішов На Хуї*” (*PuTiN, Pishov Na kHui*);
- as euphemisms: *Putin Hello!* (a wordplay, replacement of phonetically assonant obscene word of “*khui*” for the literal English “hello”), *Putin Pid-rakhui!* (*pidrakhui* — a literal Ukrainian word, the imperative mood of the verb “to count”, however, a part of this word is assonant with the obscene word “*khui*”), *Hutin — Pui!* (a wordplay, swapping of the first letters in the obscene expression), *Hutin — Pui!* (a wordplay, swapping of the first letters in the obscene expression and shortening the other word, owing to which there arise a rhyme of “*pui*” — “*khui*”).

It draws attention that the word *khui* (equivalent of *dickhead*, *putz*) in the dictionary of obscene lexis by Lesia Stavycka (the most complete Ukrainian lexicographic application as of now) is absent, but General Regionally Annotated Corpus of Ukrainian (GRAC) records that it started to be used more intensively from 2014 (Figure 1).

“The Russian worship” meme includes the obscene expression of *Idi nakhui*, the source language of which is Russian. According to the Ukrainian orthographic rules, both writing *na khui* and *nakhui* are possible, but the latter variant prevails. In the first case it is a union of the preposition *na* and the noun *khui*, in the other one — a structure with an adverb, which means the direction of movement. Let us compare: *ity na zustrich* (meeting, reception) and *ity nazustrich* (direction of movement — towards).

The expression of *Idi nakhui* is polysemantic, has an expressive connotation of the addresser’s humiliation of the addressee and can express:

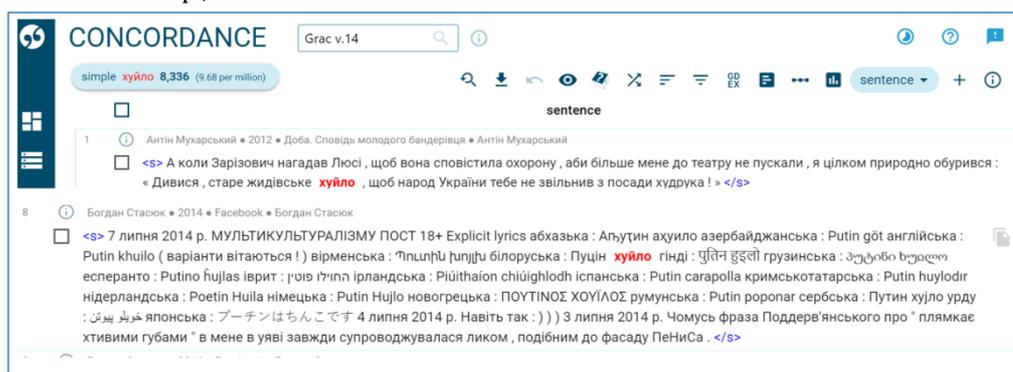


Figure 1. Screenshot of search results of “*khui*” word in General Regionally Annotated Corpus of Ukrainian (inquiry 29.08.2022)

- contempt for somebody, intention to humiliate someone;
- a demand to leave a place, to disappear from someone's view, leave a particular space;
- wish to stop relations or communication with someone, to leave;
- categorical refusal to fulfill someone's demands, advice, request, etc.;
- unwillingness to deal with something (Stavycka, 2008).

Note that analyzing a relevant series of memes, one should distinguish conversational situations of using an expression of *Russkiy voyenny korabl. Idi nakhui*.

Immediately during the implementation in the act of speech provided in the audio recording, it is an obscene expression. The addresser (the Ukrainian military man) uses in a typical communication situation (uncertainty, unexpected hazard) in the meaning recorded in the dictionary of taboo lexis, i.e. as a refusal to perform the requirement in a form humiliating for the addressee (the Russian military man).

However, as part of the meme, the expression undergoes at least two changes. On one hand, the theme of “the Russian warship” meme is made play in different contexts using metaphors, periphrases, comparisons and other figures of speech: “During the whole war only one person has held successful negotiations — the border guard from Zmiinyi Island”; “We admit, the border guard from Zmiinyi told where to go not only for a ship”, “A message to the Russian warship”, etc.

On the other hand, the introduction of the expression into the official media discourse (political, social, journalist, etc.) leads to the down-toning of the obscene categorical nature of the other part of the expression. As a result, the obscene part is gradually substituted with an ellipsed euphemism structure, and this tendency, in our opinion, will prevail after the victory of Ukraine in peaceful times.

STATEMENT OF QUESTION

While analyzing the media functionality of “the Russian warship” meme, we have to comprehend such important aspects related to social and linguacultural contexts of their formation and lifecycle:

- The meme based on an obscene expression becomes extremely popular in the media space, in particular, on the pages of official editions, in speeches of politicians and media workers, etc. This is profanity related to sexual activity of a person, its use is usually tabooed in a society. What reasons could there be for sharing this expression? Does the situation of military aggression and society's sentiments at the time influence this process?

- An obscene expression the meme is based on is an element (code) of linguaculture of the aggressor country. What mechanisms influence its entrance into the Ukrainian media environment, which has been expressing its national identity since the beginning of the large-scale invasion?

“The Russian warship” meme means a range of memes that started spreading in the media environment, particularly, in the part representing formal (politician, officials) and publicist (journalists, editors) areas, after February 24, 2022 in verbal, visual, audio and video form, and their combinations (Figure 2).

In social networks the meme is being spread practically in all formats:

- Verbal form — in text messages, headlines and leads to posts, captions to images and in the images, comments;
- Audio — in texts of songs, speeches;
- Video — video-memes, video clips to songs, bumpers to stories by video bloggers, etc.

For example, Figure 3 is a screenshot of a post from a social network from the verified account of Olexii Honcharenko, a Ukrainian politician and public man, a Deputy of Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine,

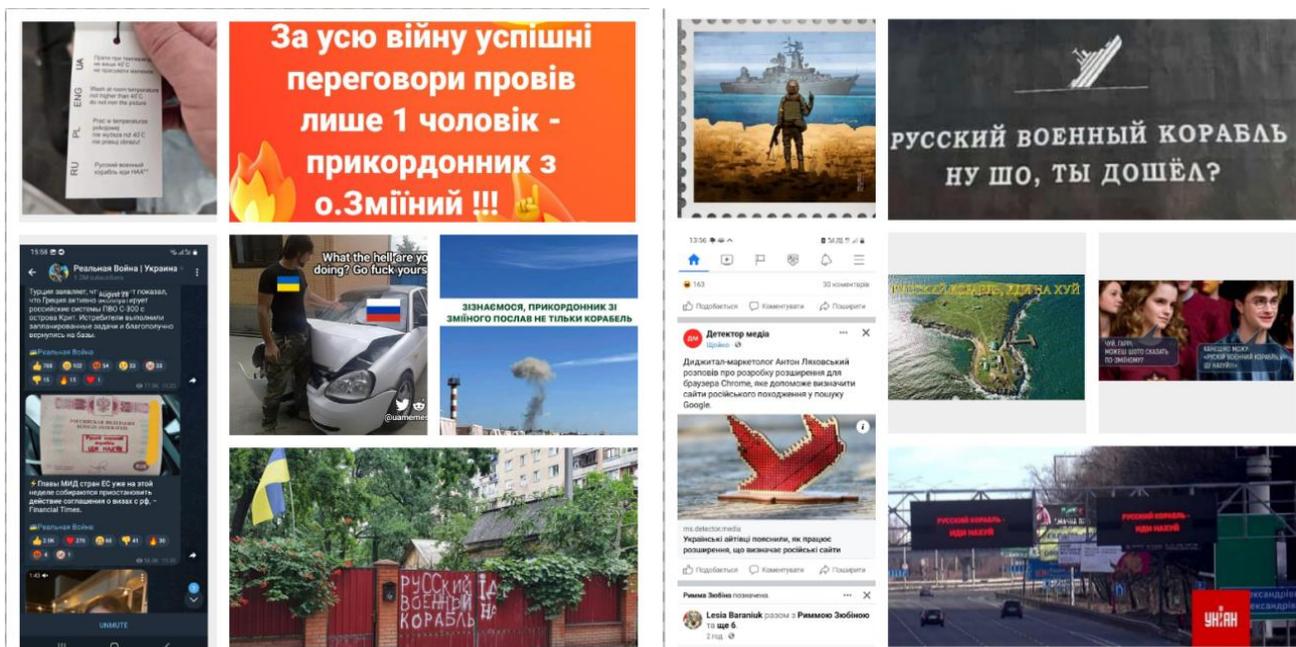


Figure 2. Kinds of “the Russian warship” meme



Figure 3. Screenshot from verified account of O. Honcharenko, a Ukrainian politician and a Deputy of Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

Text of the post:

“They also initiated a criminal case against me for threats to the murderer lukashenko.

My official comment:

Follow the Russian ship, lukashenko.”

a member of the Ukrainian delegation in PACE, Vice-President of PACE Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, with a euphemism sentence of “Follow the Russian ship, Lukashenko”.

In media content, the meme, in its different formats, is used:

- in the headline complex, as well as an illustration (Figure 4, Figure 5);
- in the textual part of the publications of internet editions, radio and television;
- in captions and bumpers to the stories on TCV;



Figure 4. Illustration to the publication of “In Ukraine the platform of “Russian warship, go fuck yourself” launched” (LB)

Words on the illustration:

Russian ship! Go fuck yourself!!!

- as soundbites (remarks of media content participants);
- as branding elements of editions, individual media projects, etc.

As the elements of headlines, the memes are used in publications devoted immediately to the events on Zmiinyi Island: “*Russian warship, go..!*” — who said the legendary phrase and why the author’s name is hidden” (SN, 23.05.22) — the publication tells about the author of the expression and explains why his name was not disclosed before; “The Ukrainian military men hit the Russian cruiser ‘Moskva’. It was the ship to which the defenders of Zmiinyi Island told ‘go fuck yourself’” (B, 13.04.22); “The author of the phrase of ‘Russian warship, go f*ck yourself’ returned home from captivity” (UN, 29.03.22); “The military man who participated in the defense of Zmiinyi Island was awarded in Cherkasy. That was he who said ‘Russian warship, go f*ck yourself’” (B, 29.03.22).

The verbal meme is an element of publications about the meme itself and its media life: “In Ukraine, a ‘Russian warship, go fuck yourself’ platform launched” (LB, 28.02.22); “In Chernivtsi, they defaced a stamp of ‘Russian warship... the end!’” (SN, 23.05.22); “‘The Russian warship, go fuck ...!’: in Vinnytsia they showed caricatures made by the artists from 20 countries in the world” (SN, 28.07.22) — the publication tells about the one-day International exhibition of caricaturists of “The Russian, warship, go fuck..!” in Vinnytsia; “After May 9 Ukrposhta will start selling a new stamp about the ‘Russian warship’. They will release individual merch with the previous stamp” (B, 29.04.22).

One more group is the headlines using different modifications of the meme: “Russian train, go f*ck! This is a position of our company”, — “Ukrzaliznytsia”, — the publication says that Ukrzaliznytsia stopped the operation with Russian Railways JSC (LB, 26.02.22); “Russian planes, go f*ck yourself from Kyiv — Poroshenko” (PRukr).



Figure 5. Illustration to the publication “In Ukraine, platform of “The Russian warship, go fuck yourself” (LB, 24.05.2022) launched”

Headline:

The Russian sailors refuse from performance of combat missions due to alert condition of ships, — military intelligence

Written on the illustration:

“The Russian warship, go ****!”

One can see a tendency to use the expression in the backgrounds of the publications with internal hyperlinks to the other pages of the edition, which can be barely related to the topic. Probably, it is specified by the requirements of SEO and intention of the editorial staff to keep the audience on the pages of the edition. For example, there is such background concerning the publication about a limited access to a Soviet cartoon “Treasures of sunken ships” (1973) on YouTube. The cartoon depicts the submarine “Neptun” which finds a sunken ship — a torpedo boat destroyer with symbol of the German Nazis “Z” on it being used now by the Russians that started the war against Ukraine. The background contains information about the sunken cruiser “Moskva” and events on Zmiinyi Island: “In the beginning of the war, the cruiser ‘Moskva’ along with the patrol ship of the Black Sea Naval Fleet of the Russian Federation ‘Vasylii Bykov’ demanded from the Zmiinyi Island defenders to surrender. They answered to this proposal with the already legendary phrase of ‘Russian warship, go fuck yourself!’ The Chairman of Verkhovna Rada Olexandr Kornienko thinks that the destruction of the ‘Moskva’ cruiser is an important symbol for Ukraine” (LB, 17.04.22).

Figure 6 demonstrates screenshots from the air of one of the Ukrainian channels — a lead-in of the presenter with the caption “The Russian soldier, go f*ck yourself”, as well as one of the air elements — broadcasting the video of “The Russian warship”.

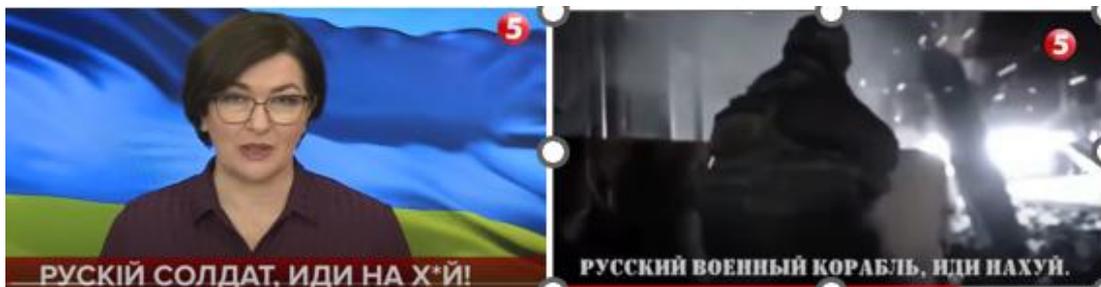


Figure 6. Screenshot of Channel 5 airtime with the use the meme in the caption on the presenter’s lead-in and in the air material (video with a song)

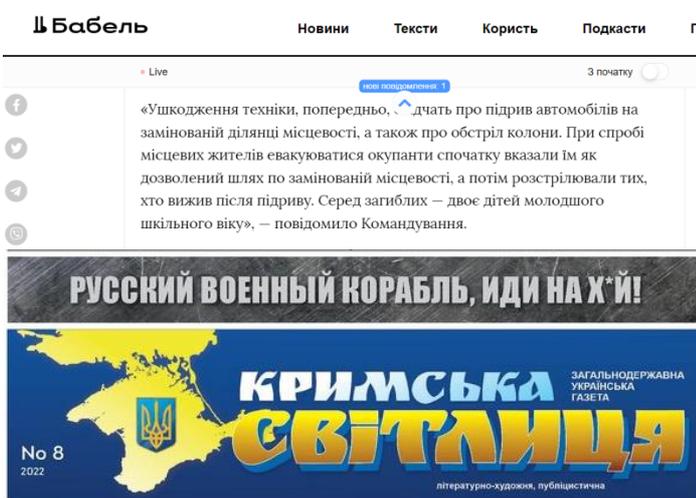


Figure 7. The meme usage for branding Internet (above) and printed (below) editions

Below there is an example of a text message with the expert’s soundbite: As Censor.NET reports, the information about defeats was also confirmed by the Head of Odessa Regional Military Administration, Maksym Marchenko. He noted: “It was confirmed that the missile cruiser ‘Moskva’ went exactly where our border guards had sent it on Zmiinyi Island! The ‘Neptun’ missiles, standing guard over the Black Sea, inflicted very serious damage on the Russian ship” (CN).

Figure 7 presents the examples of meme use for branding the Internet and printed media.

Figure 8 provides the examples of the meme’s use for issuing a media project of podcasts called “Russian fake, go ****”, the author debunks the disinformation of the Russian propaganda and fakes, reveals manipulations. The project title is a modification of the idiom-meme, where the component of “ship” is substituted with “fake”.

“THE RUSSIAN WARSHIP” MEME AS A COMPONENT OF MEDIA DISCOURSES

Firstly, pay attention to the fact that all kinds of memes analyzed in the article are based on an expression belonging not simply to the lexis of limited use, but to the **obscene** (lat. *obsenus* — vulgar, immoral) one. They are tabooed (prohibited) words and expressions related, as a rule, to the sexual activity of the person, physiological functions of the body and their results (Skudrzykowa, 2000, p. 142).



Figure 8. The example of using “the Russian warship” meme in branding a media project of podcasts “Russian fake, go ****!”

Lesia Stavycka classifies the word of *khui* as so called denudative invective, i. e. “beastly” names, pudential words, names of socially tabooed parts of body: “calling different ‘secret’ parts of body, the speaker as if demonstrates them taking clothes off them in public” (Stavycka, 2008).

A special status of the obscene lexis as a tabooed one specifies also a relevant position of researchers — lexicographers with its regard, i. e. usually this lexis is at the periphery of scientists’ attention.

The words can become tabooed at different development stages of any language, Ukrainian, in particular. This factor is one of the arguments for the supporters of the version that there are no languages without obscene lexis. As an example of a recent transfer to the category of obscene lexis one can mention such words as *chlen* (in the direct meaning — “a part of human or animal’s body”, in obscene — “membrum virile”, “penis”), *trakhnuty* (in the direct meaning — “make harsh, interrupted sounds as a result of a fall, a shot, an explosion or during work, movement, etc.”, “hit from the firearm”, “hit someone with a lot of force”, “expressive reference to any intensively expressed action”; in obscene — “have sexual relations”, “copulate”, “use someone sexually or financially”).

However, according to the survey results among the speakers, one can see that they estimate the degree of “**beastliness**” of obscene lexis (Stavycka, 2008, p. 17) in a different way. The verbal beastliness is understood as names of things and their peculiarities, deeds, actions that cause a feeling of impertinence of this word use and perception of such word use causes negative emotions in the addressee.

The volume of beastliness usually has historical and nationally specific nature (Stavycka 2008, p. 17). For example, at a particular development stage of the Ukrainian language, the words “*chlen*”, “*trakhnuty*” were not perceived by the speakers as beastly. With the development of an obscene meaning they augmented the amount of beastly lexis but speakers will estimate their beastly meaning as lower in comparison with the synonymic profanities: correspondingly, “*chlen*” — “*khui*”, “*trakhnuty*” — “*yibaty*” (*yebaty*). This understanding of the beastliness degree widens or narrows the areas of their use.

As an individual group, obscene lexis is characterized by situationality of use, relative idiomaticity (cliché), associativity of meanings, stylistic incompliance with the literary language standards, belonging to the themes tabooed in communication (Hrekov, 2019). Speakers resort to obscene lexis only in certain situations, understanding appropriateness of its use in such situations, but it is possible to use obscene expressions as senseless repetitions. Obscene expressions are mostly clichéd and reproduced by a speaker with fixed declinations, prepositions and other lexical and grammatical indicators. The obscene expressions are created as a result of associations, metonymic or metaphoric transformation, etc.

M. Grochowski pays attention to an emotional component of obscene lexis and specifies that they are the lexical units that help the speaker to express their feelings, at the same time violating language taboo. Using a vulgar expression, the speaker violates cultural and language convention that valid for a particular community.

According to a wide-spread cultural convention, the facts of human life, especially sexual, related to intimate parts of the body are not to be disclosed. The speakers understand that the use of certain expressions showing negative emotions, especially expressions — names of particular parts of the body and physiological functions (sexual intercourse) is considered inappropriate, and that the people’s community does not approve of the conversational behavior connected with the use of such expressions. In the consciousness of the speakers there is a certain kind of lexical self-censorship: they know that they violate generally accepted social standard using such sequences of sounds (Grochowski, 1995, p. 15).

The expression *idy nakhui* helps the speaker to express a strong wish to “discontinue any communication or connection with someone or something, implemented as a wish in a form derogatory for the addressee to move to a place beyond the border of the speaker’s personal area” (Stavycka, 2008, p. 26).

According to L. Stavycka, the core of “the Russian warship” meme is a so called “sending” owing to which the addresser moves away from the addressee with specification of the place of sending — “alien space”, body lower part. Its meaning relates both to a directive and expression: “I express my negative attitude to you and my wish not to see, or hear, etc., you, not to deal with you; I express a demand for you to behave in such a way for my wish to be fulfilled; at the same time I want to offend you and I am doing that” (Stavycka, 2008, p. 25).

The functions of the expression *idy nakhui* within “the Russian warship” meme as a communicative act lie in the possibilities for speakers to:

- receive psychological relief in the situation of an instant reaction to unpleasant and often unexpected course of events;
- decrease the social status of the addressee;
- establish the spirit of corporation;
- self-cheer-up in the situation related to a risk;
- use an obscene expression as a kind of a protective amulet.

The main function of the meme-expression of “the Russian warship” is **transgression** (*trans* — through; *gress* — movement), i. e. “stepping over”, overcoming social borders of the allowed, actualization of transcending as a person’s intention to leave the borders of objectivized nature and society being, overcome themselves as a subject of miscellaneous relations, self-implement as a personality in the course to meet the Other. As Michel Foucault wrote, in the act of transgression “the death of God draws us not to a limited and positive world, it draws us to the world which unfolds itself in the experience of limit,

makes itself and becomes done with itself in the act of excess, redundancy, abuse overcoming this limit, stepping over it, violating it” (Foucault, 1994).

The issue about the transgression due to the hybrid war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine is considered in one of the chapters in the monograph “Hybrid War: in Verbo et in Praxi” (2017), and these thoughts are also useful to understand the cultural context of “the Russian warship” meme because the full-scale invasion became another bloody whirl of the hybrid war started long before 2014.

M. Kolinko pays attention to the fact that transgression is addressed rather to boundedness of the person themselves than to the border of the communal, i. e. it is a kind of a person’s reaction to comprehension of the limitation of their being and it gains different forms of social practices — from the use of obscene lexis to the crimes and violations of the legislation in force. And “the war itself is a transgressive practice forcing to collective violation of the world order borders” (Hybrid war, 2017, p. 369).

However, it should be noted that the possibilities of cultural transgression performed for spiritual renewal and self-preservation of the cultural community to have been constricted for centuries since the hybrid war supposes not only actions on the battlefield but also creation of the conditions “for hidden control over cultural-and-worldview area to transform the mental field of the population of the countries-targets through re-orientation, weakening and then destroying the traditional spiritual and cultural values of the nation” (Abramov, 2020, p. 119).

Understanding the processes of how to conduct hybrid war allows for formulating relevant protective mechanisms of resistance to cultural expansion, first of all, in media environment. And the issue of the role of obscene lexis remains open in the processes of protection of spiritual and cultural values, although and, undoubtedly, quite contradictory. As V. Abramov notices (2020), transgression concerns the borders of the national safety reality itself because the violation of the standards becomes a permanent attribute of the social existence; the time for socializing social structures, standards, values the society just does not have time to comprehend reduces extremely.

Thus, the war actualizes the experience of transcending and transgression, the results of this process are the de-tabooing of obscene lexis in the Ukrainian media environment and the appearance of a range of memes with an obscene language core. The mem of “RUS — NI! PEACE — DA!” (Figure 9) can serve as an example. The humorous effect from the meme is specified by the uniting of literary English words (“RUS” — Russia or Russians, “PEACE” — peace) and Ukrainian (“NI” — “NO!”, “DA” — “YES!”), which form the words new in meaning, one of which is colloquial

and the other — obscene: “rusni pisda”. “Rusnia” — is a scornful title of the Russians and “pisda” is an obscene word for “vagina”, equivalent of “cunt”, “twat”, etc. Thus, if one is to read the written as the words of different languages there will be an anti-war slogan with the meaning of “Russia — No, Peace — Yes”; if to read it as Ukrainian words — “Rusni pisda”, i. e. the same anti-war slogan but not neutral, it will be with an emotional martial connotation. That creates additional context for the perception of the anti-war appeal: the victory and peace are possible if the bearers of different languages (different states) will unite their forces in struggle against evil.

Hence, we can observe how this and similar memes overcome fast cultural and language taboos, develop a wide use not only in Ukrainian-speaking media: “‘Russian warship, go fuck yourself’: Kyiv to honour troops killed on island” (R); “‘Russian warship, go f*** yourselves’: Final words of Ukrainian border guards protecting Snake Island — just 40 miles from Romanian border in the Black Sea — before Kremlin navy opened fire killing all 13 of them when they refused to surrender” (DM); “‘Ukraine soldiers told Russians to ‘go fuck yourself’ before Black Sea island death” (TG); “‘Ukraine soldiers who told Russian ship to ‘go f*ck yourself’ freed in prisoner swap” (TI); “‘Russkij wojennyj korabl, idi na chuj’. Dosadna odpowiedź ukraińskich bohaterów rosyjskim faszystom” (Npl); “‘Idi na chuj’ — rosyjska marynarka zdobyła wyspę węży i na tym jej rola się na razie skończyła” (Kpl), etc.

The obscene expression tabooed in a peaceful, determined and standardized life, has developed the halo of heroism, a legend as an idiom and verbal component of the meme. They start to call it a war-cry of resistance to the Russian warfare aggression: “‘Legendary expression. Let us remind, the border guards from Zmiinyi Island, to the proposition of the Russian ship to surrender, answered: ‘*Russkiy voyennyj korabl. Idi nakh...*’” “That is his (Roman Hribov’s — author’s note) expression of ‘*Russkiy voyennyj korabl. Idi nakhui*’ has become a war-cry of the Ukrainians in fight against occupants, which all Europe and other world know” (G, 06.03.2022).

Extralinguistic factors are determining to develop this connotation of “the Russian warship” meme: the beginning of the war, the inevitability of which was under an intensive discussion but there were doubts in its possibility; the attack on Zmiinyi Island; the absence of precise data about the destiny of the border guards; the statement of their death and then information about their capture; the panic and perplexity caused by these events; the pride and bravery of a deed of a person who is on the border of death and life; the need to find your own support point; the non-understanding what to do next, etc.

Thus, in media environment “the Russian warship” meme becomes, first



Figure 9. O. Hrekov.
RUS — NI! PEACE — DA!

of all, a symbol of brave and desperate resistance to the unjustified military aggression and violation of the world order established after World War II. In its lifecycle in the media environment it is included into new sociocultural contexts; that leads to the transformation of its sociocultural code with regard to the cultural belonging of the information modifier and the consumer. For example, Zuzanna Stańska discloses one of the historic contexts of the “Russian warship” meme, illustrating the publication under the author’s meme of Maciej Lubiński. Its basis is quite a famous painting by Illya Repin “The Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks”, the unfinished draft, 1891, which is kept now in the Kharkiv Art Museum in the city of Kharkiv, which is being intensively shelled by the Russians (Stańska, 2022). We assume that the verbal obscene component as a part of a meme is rather an emotional manifestation because understanding its emotive potential by the representatives of different linguacultures will differ. Moreover, not all memes with obscene lexis in them become so widely spread in the media environment as “the Russian warship” meme.

As an example, we can provide memes with a similar obscene expression from the Polish media culture (Figure 10 and Figure 11). In the first meme, the image of a monkey represents a typical greedy guy who deceives everybody, envies his neighbours and is not ready to pay to anybody for anything. Thus, this “monkey” will deceive you and find enough arguments for that rather than pay.



Figure 10. Meme ‘Ale ich w chuja
zrobiłem z wypłata’,
bibly.pl

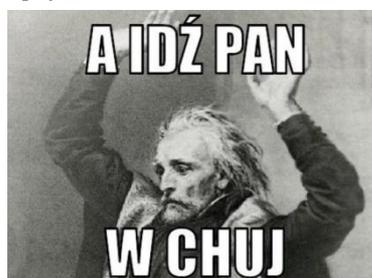


Figure 11. Meme
‘A idź pan w ch...’,
memy.pl

Humorous effect of the other meme is created by a traditional technique of discrepancy between “high” and “low”. The meme is based on a famous picture depicting a famous doer of the past, a person of high morality, preacher pater (ksiądz) Skarga. A writing with an obscene word is added to it.

These memes are connected, to some extent, to transgression, but this is postmodern transgression of everyday life — ruining the authority, carnivality. These memes do not become extremely popular in media and are taken rather as a plebeian joke in the direct meaning of obscene expressions.

Instead, the situation with “the Russian warship” meme is different, because it, apart from the codes of particular linguaculture, is a fixation of a phenomenon, which some experts call “the first world media war”. The interview with A. Drobovych “The First

World Media War’ can be provided as an example of this point of view. What will Russia’s attack on Ukraine be called in history and what to do to May, 9”, where the hero notices: “Concerning the specifics of this war. The battlefield is not only the territory of Ukraine. In the information environment this is, maybe, the biggest media war in the history of mankind. This was absent during World War II. Even the war in Syria,... there were not so many people in the combat zone with gadgets and Internet showing that. Correspondingly, the engagement into this war is much higher” (NV).

Notice that it does not say only about available numerous technical means that fix combat operations, war crimes but also about powerful media processes of both positive and negative types: attacks through disinformation and fakes, resistance through discrediting disinformation, creation of heroism discourses, glorifying real and fabulous victories, humiliation of the enemy, etc.

“The Russian warship” meme is an important element of these processes adding the **discourse of heroism or legend** at the same level as histories about the deeds of “Azovstal” heroes, “the Ghost of Kyiv”, the symbol of invincibility — a cupboard with a rooster in Borodianka, the story of cat Gloriii’s rescue, the dog-pyrotechnist Patron, the legends about Chornobaivka, the little animal Bavovniatko and many others.

It should be specified that the media themselves determine this phenomenon continuing the creation the discourse of heroism. The publications of “From “Ghost” to “Azovstal”. 7 symbols of Ukraine’s invincibility during the war” (UT), “Legends and memes of the war: the Ukrainians have been committing people’s resistance for 100 days already” (IPN) etc., can be provided as an example.

In fact, the story of the border guards from Zmiinyi Island, their reply to the Russian warship, the destruction of “Moskva” etc., in media publications both in Ukraine and the world, are marked “legendary”, “heroic”: “*Bohaterska śmierć obrońców Wyspy Węży. ‘Rosyjski okręcie wojenny, spie***laj’*” (Wpl); ““The Russian warship, go ***!’ — who said the *legendary* phrase and why the name of the author is not disclosed” (SN); ““The Russian warship, go f***’, — was heard the answer to have already become *legendary*. The island was occupied, and in several weeks ‘Moskva’ was destroyed” (SFO).

Moreover, “the Russian warship” meme relates also to one more discourse traditional for the Ukrainian culture — the **discourse of a hero’s immortality**. Recollect in this context the phenomenon of postwar literature – chimera novels, in particular “Cossack family has no end” and transgressive motifs in created images of their heroes (Zhuravska, 2018).

Although media environment is a new phenomenon, it does not only create new but also implements codes and manifests inherent to Ukrainian culture. The discourse of immortality actualized by the meme is not accidental because first it was officially announced that the defenders of Zmiinyi had died and then it became known that they had been captured. In this way, the heroes of the current Ukrainian legend became “animated”, which is completely logical for “media hyperreality with their simulations and simulacra” (Abramov, 2020) and it was not left unnoticed by the aggressor. The Russian media started sharing propagandistic memes, the typical examples of which are “Never make the Russian warship angry”, “You go f*** yourself”.

Further events (the destruction of “Moskva”, the liberation of the island, the establishment of the Ukrainian flag on it) only stimulated the work of the Russian military propaganda on disinformation. Russian propaganda generates numerous fakes trying to distort the legendary Ukrainian myth of Zmiinyi and to create their own one, where the heroic deed of the Ukrainian border guards had to be cancelled: “Shoigu called an attempt of the Ukraine’s Armed Forces to take over Zmiinyi Island a complete failure”; “Russia as a gesture of a kind will took the station out of Zmiinyi Island”; “Keosian: the flag of Ukraine lies as a miserable rag on Zmiinyi Island” (RNrus). The mentioned headlines of the Russian agency demonstrate the violation of journalistic standards, distortion of facts, pumping with emotional and judgmental lexis, etc.

First, the state Russian agencies shared the information that V. Zelenskiy ordered to attack the island for a “media” result to May 9 “Victory Day” following the advice from the British consultant. Moreover, the fake developers did not take into account the localization of binding certain dates to the Soviet chronotopos of Great Victory and their absence in current postimperial cultures, particularly, Ukrainian. Then, the Russian propagandists added their version of events on Zmiinyi with a made-up story that the Ukrainian military men believed the legend about the burial of Achilles on the island with his shield, which gives power over the world and are trying to capture this mythic artefact. The Russian media supported this fake version with articles like “The one who owns Zmiinyi — owns the world: Why the Russian troops took the sacral territory”. In fact, the island has a strategic meaning, unrelated to myths but rather to a need of Ukraine to protect its south areas and the Ukrainian waters in the Black sea; that is why it was recaptured from the occupants (Ishchenko, 2022).

The motif of “heroism” correlates to motifs of “insanity”, “immortality” and characterize a significant part of media products related to “the Russian warship” meme.

Vasyl Vyrozub, an Odesa priest, who departed to Zmiinyi Island on the “Sapfir” rescue boat to take the bodies of border guards and was captured, in his interview to Hromadske radio said: “They thought

that we were a special unit to capture Zmiinyi. When they found out that we were real chaplains because we were dressed accordingly, they said: ‘You are either *insane* or *immortal*’. I thought a bit and said: ‘You know, *immortal*, indeed’” (NS). In the report from Kharkiv, a Ukrainian city being shelled every day, the heroine Olena Rofe-Beketova, a Director of the biggest local charity fund says: “They went out and fooled around, roared with laughter, demonstrating scorn instead of fear, to send their univocal message to the ‘Russian warship’” (Halko, 2022).

The examples above are also interesting due to their demonstration of awareness about the message to the “Russian warship” formed in the consciousness of Ukrainians as an extremely brave and heroic action. One can see tight cooperation, transfer of media messages into audience’s consciousness and vice versa — the society’s position formed pumps the media environment.

Thus, “the Russian warship” meme, the verbal core of which is an obscene expression is instantly spread in the media environment, particularly, in the official one, violating conventional cultural and lingual taboo. For the Ukrainian society it became a kind of cultural transgression caused mainly by the situation of hostility and relevant public sentiments. The meme is shared in the conditions of the hybrid war and information counterstand as its important component and basis for creation of legendary myths of new times. As a media product, the meme actualizes discourses of heroism, immortality, being implemented through the codes both of Ukrainian national and universal media culture first of all, as a component of a news discourse (operative and socially significant news).

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Оксана Журавська

Київський університет імені Бориса Грінченка, Україна

СИМВОЛІЧНА ПРИРОДА, КУЛЬТУРНІ КОДИ І МЕДІАФУНКЦІОНАЛЬНІСТЬ МЕМА «РУССКІЙ ВОЄННИЙ КОРАБЛЬ»

Частина перша

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 додання 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 природа і дискурс цього мема.

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

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