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Olena Yemelianova,
Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor,
Associate Professor at the Department of Germanic Philology,
Sumy State University
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3277-1227>
Sumy, Ukraine

Adjectives as the reflection of the Russian-Ukrainian war perception

Прикметники як відображення сприйняття російсько-української війни

Анотація. Статтю присвячено аналізу особливостей сприйняття російсько-української війни студентами через інформацію, представлену в мас-медійному дискурсі. Метою дослідження є прикметники як один із найважливіших засобів вираження оцінної семантики, що характеризує уявлення студентів про російсько-українську війну. Дослідження сприйняття студентами російсько-української війни через різні ЗМІ показує зміну їх поглядів з часом. Спочатку, у лютому 2022 року, переважали описові прикметники (38,94%), насичені моральні прикметники (30,5%) і ціннісно-пов'язані прикметники (27,4%), що свідчить про те, що війна сприймалася як несподівана, жорстока, несправедлива та насильницька. У червні 2024 року спостерігалось збільшення використання описових прикметників (46,9%), невелике зростання ціннісно-пов'язаних (28,1%), і помітне зниження насичених моральних прикметників (17,7%). Цей зсув вказує на сприйняття конфлікту як тривалого, виснажливого та тупикового. У дослідженні також виявлено використання синонімічних прикметників, розкриваючи специфіку розуміння війни та її представлення в ЗМІ.

Дослідження також визначає використання синонімічних прикметників, класифікованих як тонкі, насичені, ціннісно-пов'язані та описові, пропонує аналіз змін сприйняття війни та її медійного представлення. Загалом отримані дані свідчать про динамічний характер суспільного сприйняття російсько-української війни, який змінюється від початкового шоку та сувереного морального осуду до перерозподілу уваги на описових та ціннісно-пов'язаних аспектах під час продовження конфлікту. Перспектива дослідження передбачає ретельний проаналіз як нарративів ЗМІ, так і публічного дискурсу, з метою об'єктивного збереження та вианування національної пам'яті.

Ключові слова: описові прикметники, насичені моральні прикметники, насичені неморальні прикметники, ціннісно-пов'язані прикметники, тонкі прикметники, російсько-українська війна.

Summary. The article is focused on the analysis of the specifics of the Russian-Ukrainian war perception by students through the information presented in the

mass media discourse. The objective of the research is adjectives, as one of the most important means of expressing evaluative semantics, characterizing the students' perception of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The study on students' perceptions of the Russian-Ukrainian war through various mass media sources shows a change in their views over time. Initially, in February 2022, descriptive adjectives (38.94%), thick moral adjectives (30.5%), and value-associated adjectives (27.4%) were prevalent, suggesting the war was seen as unexpected, cruel, unfair, and violent. By June 2024, there was an increased use of descriptive adjectives (46.9%), a slight rise in value-associated adjectives (28.1%), and a notable drop in thick moral adjectives (17.7%). This shift indicates a perception of the conflict as prolonged, exhausting, and stalemated. The study also identifies the use of synonymous adjectives offering insights into the evolving understanding of the war and its media portrayal.

The study also identifies the use of synonymous adjectives categorized as thin, thick, value-associated, and descriptive, offering insights into the evolving understanding of the war and its media portrayal. Overall, the findings show the dynamic nature of public perception of the Russian-Ukrainian war, shifting from initial shock and moral judgment to a focus on descriptive and value-associated aspects as the conflict continues. Future research should thoroughly analyze both media narratives and public discourse to preserve national memory.

Key words: *descriptive adjectives, thick moral adjectives, thick nonmoral adjectives, value-associated adjectives, thin adjectives, Russian-Ukrainian war.*

Introduction. In recent decades, there has been a growing interest among linguists in the study of the phenomenon of the category of evaluation – one of the most in-demand in the linguistic worldview of the speaker, as its semantics carries within it a system of values of the surrounding world and the value of a person in it, objectified in units of language. As the linguists point out: “Evaluation and the process of evaluation permeate all aspects of human life. Evaluative activity reflects the process of human interaction with the facts of the surrounding world and their value-based attitude towards the surrounding realities” [1, p. 30].

The researchers study the explicit means of the evaluation category implementation in the discourse of Internet comments [1]; thick and thin adjectives through corpora [4]; the specifics of projecting otherness in media discourse of the Russia-Ukraine war [5]; the war in Ukraine and foreign news reporting [2]; use corpus-assisted analysis to such queries as Ukraine and Russia in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war [3].

In this perspective the study of the adjective comes to the forefront, as the adjective is ontologically inherent in the characteristic (relation, including value) as the basis of quality, and its typology is based on the differences between the carriers of the attribute, the objects of evaluation. The development of the pragmatic potential of linguistic units, including adjectives, the strengthening of their impact force, as well as the need for a systematic study of the evaluative function as a strategy of influencing the addressee, determines the **relevance** of the chosen research topic.

The **subject matter** of the study is the evaluative analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian war perception by students through the information presented in the mass media discourse. The **objective** of the research is adjectives, as one of the most important means of expressing evaluative semantics, characterizing the students' perception of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The **aim** of the study is to analyze the specifics of the Russian-Ukrainian war perception by students through the information presented in the mass media discourse.

Methodology. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative techniques. For the quantitative component and to evaluate the specifics of the perception of the Russian-Ukrainian war (through the information presented in different sources of mass media) by the young people who are and will be the carriers of the Ukrainian national memory and to analyse the formation of a resilient Ukrainian identity through an individual war experience, the survey among the first-, second-, third- and fourth-year Bachelor students and first-year Master students of the Department of Germanic Philology, Faculty of Foreign Philology and Social Communications, Sumy State University was conducted. 32 students took part in the survey in June 2024. One of the questions of the survey suggested students giving 3 (three) adjectives that precisely characterise the Russian-Ukrainian war according to mass media:

- a) at the beginning of the war – February 2022 (3 adjectives);
- b) now – June 2024 3 (three) adjectives.

The qualitative portion of the study involved in-depth analysis of the survey results, exploring the students' perception of the media's portrayal of the war. By combining the quantitative survey data with the rich qualitative insights, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how university students perceive the Russian-Ukrainian war through the lens of media reporting and their personal adjectives choice to describe it.

Results and Discussion. It should be mentioned that the semantic-grammatical and communicative-functional properties of adjectives are closely tied to their evaluative function in the following ways:

1) in the aspect of semantic-grammatical properties adjectives inherently carry a “characteristic” or “relation” that forms the basis for expressing evaluation and quality. The typology of adjectives is derived from the differences in the objects or entities being evaluated. Adjectives indicate specific states, qualities, and attributes that are ascribed to the object being described. This semantic content allows adjectives to convey evaluative meaning, either positive or negative;

2) in the aspect of communicative-functional properties adjectives serve as strategic linguistic tools for influencing the addressee through the

expression of evaluation. The pragmatic potential of adjectives, i.e. their ability to impact the addressee, is enhanced when used evaluatively. Evaluative adjectives allow the speaker to convey their system of values and attitudes towards the world in general and towards specific events, objects, people etc. The evaluative function of adjectives is considered a key communicative strategy for shaping the addressee's perception and beliefs.

The semantic-grammatical makeup of adjectives, which centers around qualities and characteristics, provides the foundation for their evaluative capacity. This evaluative potential is then leveraged by speakers in the communicative-functional dimension to express their subjective assessments and influence the addressee. Understanding this interplay is crucial for a comprehensive analysis of the evaluative function of adjectives.

People constantly evaluate themselves, other people, and the surrounding reality, expressing their attitudes through various means in the process of communication. Among the many interpretations of evaluation are the communicative (approval :: disapproval), emotional (pleasant :: unpleasant), qualitative (good :: bad), rational (useful :: harmful), and others. The underlying issue is the problem of the significance of the object for the subject who has chosen it as the object of a value-based attitude, which is based on the feature of good :: bad. As value attitudes reflect the general laws of human thinking, so evaluation can be considered a universal linguistic category.

The basis of the specific features of the semantics of evaluation lies in the nature of its components – the evaluating subject, the evaluated object, the evaluative predicate, the grounds for the evaluation, and its character. Despite the external, verbal discreteness of the evaluation, it represents a correlate of the opinion about the value in the linguistic consciousness of the speaker, based on the discrete elements of the evaluation scale.

In other words, the specific semantic features of evaluation are rooted in the key components involved – the evaluating subject, the object being evaluated, the evaluative language used, the basis for the evaluation, and the overall character of the evaluation. Although evaluation may be expressed discretely through verbal means, it ultimately reflects a more holistic opinion or judgment about the value or worth of something, grounded in the speaker's linguistic and cognitive framework of evaluative scales and criteria. Moreover, the distinctive feature of the meaning and use of evaluative adjectives is that their structure combines the semantic and pragmatic aspects of language, that is, there are both subjective-evaluative meanings embedded in the semantic structure of the vocabulary, as well as the corresponding connotations.

It should be mentioned that, a distinctive feature of the semantics of evaluative adjectives is that the interplay between the semantic and pragmatic

aspects is encoded within the semantic structure of the lexical unit itself. The evaluative meaning and associated pragmatic implications are intertwined and manifested in the overall semantic structure of the adjective.

The well-known division of evaluative meanings in logic into internal and external reflects the connection between subjective and objective factors: the value-based worldview of a society is based on positive or negative emotions (pleasure/displeasure) evoked by the properties, quality, appearance, functions, etc. of the object of evaluation.

As M. Strukowska points out: "Otherness serves as means of legitimising media actions as preventive measures taken to inform society about the past, create the present state of the world through assertions which endorse media credibility and predict future outcomes with respect to the horror of the unfolding war" [5, p. 77].

The analysed material (see Table 1) shows that the students' perception of the Russian-Ukrainian war through different mass media resources at the beginning of the invasion (February 2022) is rated as follows (the figure in parentheses after each adjective means the number of times the adjective is mentioned in students' responses):

I – *unexpected* (8); II – *cruel* (5); *unfair* (5); *violent* (5); III – *aggressive* (4); *sudden* (4); IV – *chaotic* (3); *fast* (3); *patriotic* (3); *ruthless* (3); *short-term* (3); V – *deadly* (2); *devastating* (2); *horrible* (2); *international* (2); *rapid* (2); *quick* (2); *shocking* (2); *unprovoked* (2),

while in June 2024 the students' perception of the Russian-Ukrainian war through different mass media resources is different. The frequency of the adjectives mentioned is the following:

I – *devastating* (4); *protracted* (4); *stalemated* (4); II – *exhausting* (3); *cruel* (3); *humanitarian* (3); *long* (3); *ongoing* (3); *stalemate* (3); III – *aggressive* (2); *complex* (2); *drawn-out* (2); *exhausted* (2); *hopeless* (2); *long-lasting* (2); *prolonged* (2); *violent* (2).

Among the adjectives mentioned by students, we can easily trace a number of synonymous ones:

for the beginning of the war (February 2022): *aggressive* (4) / *violent* (5) / *brutal* (1) / *cruel* (5) / *ruthless* (3) / *heartless* (1); *anxious* (1) / *tense* (1) / *terrified* (1); *fast* (3) / *rapid* (1) / *quick* (2) / *swift* (1); *horrible* (2) / *terrible* (1) / *terrifying* (1); *intense* (1) / *violent* (5); *scary* (1) / *terrifying* (1) / *shocking* (2); *sudden* (4) / *unexpected* (8) / *unpredictable* (1);

for June 2024: *aggressive* (2) / *violent* (2) / *bloody* (1) / *cruel* (3) / *ruthless* (1); *angry* (1) / *ratty* (1); *complex* (2) / *complicated* (1); *depressive* (1) / *sad* (1); *desperate* (1) / *hopeless* (2); *drawn-out* (2) / *prolonged* (2) / *protracted* (4) / *ongoing* (3); *long* (3) / *long-haul* (1) / *long-lasting* (2) / *long-term* (1) / *never-ending* (1); *horrible* (1) / *terrible* (1); *intense* (1) / *violent* (2); *stalemate* (3) / *stalemated* (4).

Relevant for the research is the analysis of the adjectives in the aspect of their belonging to a certain class, namely to thin, thick, value-associated, descriptive adjectives suggested by K. Reuter, L. Baumgartner, P. Willemsen [4]. According to the scholars, “thin concepts ... evaluate without specifying the descriptive aspects that ground their evaluation”, while “thick concepts ... describe and evaluate at the same time” [4, p. 263], value-associated adjectives convey a judgment, opinion, or evaluation, descriptive adjectives simply describe a physical or observable characteristic such as size, color, or texture. The scientists further subdivide thick adjectives into thick moral and thick nonmoral [4, p. 171]. The analysis of the students’ responses regarding the class of adjectives and the number of times the adjective is mentioned in students’ responses (that is the figure given in parentheses after each adjective) is provided in table 1.

The adjective classification into thin, thick moral, thick nonmoral, value-associated and descriptive is based on the suggestions made by K. Reuter, L. Baumgartner, P. Willemsen [4, p. 269] as well as on the author’s intuition and thorough analysis of the thin and thick concepts research.

The data analysis of the adjectives given by students as their perception of the Russian-Ukrainian war through the information presented in mass media in the aspect of adjectives classes (thin, thick moral, thick nonmoral, value-associated, descriptive) representation demonstrates that at the beginning of the war (February 2022) descriptive adjectives accounted for 38,94 %; thick moral adjectives – 30,5%; value-associated adjectives – 27,4%; thin adjectives – 3,16%, but in June 2024 we observe the shift in the perception of the war perception through the information in mass media: descriptive adjectives come first in numbers accounting for 46,9% just as at the beginning of the war, but their number grew up by nearly 8%; then come value-associated adjectives – 28,1% (their number increased by 0,7%); thick moral adjectives shifted downwards now being third in the rating and accounting for 17,7% (the number decreased significantly by 12,8% in comparison with the beginning of the war); then come thick nonmoral adjectives – 5,22% and thin adjectives are the least numerable – 2,08%.

Conclusions. The results of the analysis show that the meaning and usage of evaluative adjectives encompasses both semantic and pragmatic dimensions. They carry not only the subjective, evaluative meaning inherent in their semantic structure, but also the associated connotations and pragmatic implications. This blending of the semantic and pragmatic aspects is a key characteristic of how evaluative adjectives function in language.

Table 1

Adjectives that precisely characterise the Russian-Ukrainian war according to mass media a) at the beginning of the war – February 2022	Class of adjectives	Adjectives that precisely characterise the Russian-Ukrainian war according to mass media b) now – June 2024	Class of adjectives
active (1)	descriptive	affiliate (1)	descriptive
aggressive (4)	thick moral	aggressive (2)	thick moral
anxious (1)	descriptive	angry (1)	value-associated
brutal (1)	thick moral	bloody (1)	thick moral
catastrophic (1)	value-associated	catastrophic (1)	value-associated
chaotic (3)	value-associated	complex (2)	descriptive
cruel (5)	thick moral	complicated (1)	descriptive
deadly (2)	value-associated	corrupt (1)	thick moral
depressing (1)	value-associated	cruel (3)	thick moral
devastating (2)	value-associated	depressive (1)	value-associated
dramatic (1)	value-associated	desperate (1)	value-associated
emotional (1)	descriptive	devastating (4)	value-associated
escalating (1)	descriptive	drawn out (2)	value-associated
expectable (1)	descriptive	energy-taking (1)	descriptive
fast (3)	descriptive	entrenched (1)	descriptive
heartless (1)	thick moral	exhausted (2)	value-associated
heavy (1)	value-associated	exhausting (3)	thick nonmoral
horrible (2)	thin	extensive (1)	value-associated
immediate (1)	descriptive	frightening (1)	thick nonmoral
initial (1)	descriptive	full-scale (1)	descriptive
insidious (1)	thick moral	geopolitical (1)	descriptive
intense (1)	thick moral	hopeless (2)	value-associated
international (2)	descriptive	horrible (1)	thin
military-only (1)	descriptive	human resources less (1)	descriptive
on-going (1)	descriptive	humanitarian (3)	descriptive
patriotic (3)	thick moral	immense (1)	descriptive
protected (1)	value-associated	intense (1)	descriptive
quick (2)	descriptive	internationalized (1)	descriptive
rapid (2)	descriptive	killing (1)	thick moral
ruthless (3)	thick moral	large-scale (1)	descriptive
sad (1)	value-associated	long (3)	descriptive
scary (1)	value-associated	long-haul (1)	descriptive
shocking (2)	value-associated	long-lasting (2)	descriptive
short-term (3)	descriptive	long-term (1)	descriptive
strong (1)	value-associated	losable (1)	thick nonmoral
successful (1)	value-associated	mean (1)	thick moral

sudden (4)	descriptive	military (1)	descriptive
sure (1)	descriptive	more stable (1)	descriptive
swift (1)	descriptive	never-ending (1)	value-associated
temporary (1)	descriptive	ongoing (1)	descriptive
tense (1)	value-associated	patriotic (1)	thick moral
terrible (1)	thin	political (1)	descriptive
terrified (1)	value-associated	poor (1)	value-associated
terrifying (1)	value-associated	powerful (1)	value-associated
threatful (1)	value-associated	problematic (1)	value-associated
unexpected (8)	descriptive	prolonged (2)	descriptive
unfair (5)	thick moral	protracted (4)	descriptive
unpredictable (1)	descriptive	ratty (1)	value-associated
unprovoked (2)	value-associated	ruthless (1)	thick moral
victory-leading (1)	value-associated	sad (1)	value-associated
violent (5)	thick moral	same (1)	descriptive
volatile (1)	value-associated	senseless (1)	value-associated
		shameful (1)	thick moral
		slow (1)	descriptive
		stalemate (3)	descriptive
		stalemated (4)	descriptive
		strategic (1)	descriptive
		terrible (1)	thin
		terrorist (1)	thick moral
		terroristic (1)	thick moral
		traumatizing (1)	value-associated
		tremendous (1)	value-associated
		unfair (1)	thick moral
		unprovoked (1)	value-associated
		violent (2)	thick moral
		vulnerable (1)	value-associated
		weak (1)	value-associated
		weaponed (1)	descriptive
		zoned (1)	descriptive

The analysis of the students' perceptions of the Russian-Ukrainian war through different mass media resources reveals a shift in their perspective over time. In the initial stages of the conflict in February 2022, descriptive adjectives (38.94%), thick moral adjectives (30.5%), and value-associated adjectives (27.4%) dominated, indicating an overall perception of the war as *unexpected*, *cruel*, *unfair*, and *violent*. However, by June 2024, the students' perception had evolved, with descriptive adjectives becoming even more prominent (46.9%), followed by value-associated adjectives (28.1%) and a significant decrease in thick moral adjectives (17.7%).

This suggests a greater focus on the prolonged, exhausting, and stalemated nature of the conflict, as reflected in the increased use of adjectives like *devastating*, *protracted*, and *stalemated*.

The analysis also reveals the use of synonymous adjectives, which can be classified into thin, thick, value-associated, and descriptive categories. This provides insights into the students' evolving understanding of the war and the way it is portrayed in the media. Overall, the findings demonstrate the dynamic nature of public perception of the Russian-Ukrainian war, with a shift from a focus on the initial shock and moral aspects to a greater emphasis on the descriptive and value-associated elements as the conflict has progressed.

The prospects of the research is seen in the thorough analysis of both the media narratives and the public discourse in the aspect of preserving national memory.

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