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VERBO-VISUAL PUN IN MEMETIC WARFARE AGAINST RUSSIA'S AGGRESSION IN UKRAINE

With humor, which has long been known as a coping mechanism in extreme crises, punning memes, armed with words and images, have become weapons of 'mass disruption' influencing the hearts and minds of a target audience. This invites the examination of how memes detailing Russian-Ukrainian war employ verbo-visual puns as a strategic tool of information warfare to counter president Putin's military aggression and misleading political messaging. This article¹ proposes an interdisciplinary template for the analysis of puns drawing on multimodal social semiotics, cognitive linguistics, critical discourse analysis and crisis communication analysis. The data sampled for this research comprises 87 memes about Russian-Ukrainian war that employ verbo-visual puns with 6 cases described in this paper. The article proposes a taxonomy, in which verbo-visual puns can be classified in accordance with mechanisms that are used to classify wordplay (homonymy, polysemy, and paronymy). Evidence is thus provided to show that this typology is applicable to the taxonomy of multimodal signs as well. The results of this research reveal cognitive and semiotic triggers of puns as well as their potential to serve as a tool generating public reaction to Russia's military aggression in Ukraine and reaching the intended goals of crisis communication.

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1. Introduction

The advanced spread of Russian propaganda against foreign countries, including Ukraine (see Geisea 2015), has considerably changed the Russian Federation citizens' worldview, where Ukrainians have ceased to be 'brothers', and has led to the full-scale military aggression in Ukraine. The war unleashed by the Russian president Vladimir Putin against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 has brought massive destruction, multiple deaths of the civilians, and genocide, erasing a modern state in the heart of Europe. In the face of the claims by the Russian Federation, Ukraine started an unprecedented struggle inspired by a long, multi-generational drive for national self-determination. The armed resistance sprang up in Ukraine in several arenas – not only on the 'offline' battlefield but also in the cyber domain, which can pursue a competitive advantage over the enemy. It arises the interest in the study of English language memes as a new frontier of information warfare against Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

This article demonstrates how Internet memes are a medium for modern information warfare that utilizes verbo-visual puns as a positive persuasion strategy with a potential to inspire public reactions (Waller 2006). The term *memetic warfare* has been in circulation among foreign policy thinkers for about a decade now (Hancock 2010) and has been introduced into the realm of linguistics as part of public discourses that have long operated by construing representations of political feuds, terrorist attacks, military confrontations, and other crises. In times of public danger, communication systems draw all available channels to disseminate multiple meanings via a range of signaling systems. Prior to the era of modern computing, the ongoing aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine created a need for the cyberspace to use all the potentialities of the Internet. Memes as one of the Web's most important assets develop fruitful symbiotic relationship with pun to make sense of the Russian Federation as a threat and damage its political credibility in the minds of others.

In contrast to a more familiar view of pun as one of the categories of wordplay that involves exclusively verbal means, in the polycode environment it appears as a multimodal construction created by several modes – verbal and nonverbal (pictorial and/or aural), wherein both elements are complementary and cannot be interpreted separately. This study is limited to verbo-visual pun, which is a

little researched phenomenon across disciplines. Empirical research on verbo-visual puns has been narrowed to the study of their processing (Zenner and Geeraerts 2018) and translatability (Lazreg 2021; Kovalenko and Martynyuk 2021). However, investigation into verbo-visual pun in the polycode space of Internet memes for different purposes of crisis information and management as well as a counter propaganda strategy has received little attention. Therefore, the aim of this study is to fill this gap and get behind the logic of pun production and semiotic structure of multimodal puns through which serious events change into laughable ones in order to solve numerous goals of crisis communication.

This paper is organised as follows. This section (1) serves as an introduction. Section 2 presents the theoretical background of the research and offers a general review of memes and verbo-visual puns. Section 3 presents the methodological grounding of this study and provides insights into the semiotic mechanisms that underpin verbo-visual puns and their potential to serve as a strategy of crisis communication and management. Section 4 is a case study of six verbo-visual puns in English language Internet memes about the Russian-Ukrainian war. Section 5 concludes the study and section 6 puts forward suggestions for further research.

2. Theoretical background

My point of departure is the recognition of the fact that language is neither the sole, nor the privileged sign system. Traditional linguistics, that until recently has mainly focused on the study of linguistic code and the formalization of the phonological, morphological, and syntactic structure that it offers, has switched to the investigation of other sign systems, such as gesture, images, graphics, and typography as an integral part of modern communication. Meanwhile, by concentrating on linguistic expression accompanied by vocal and visual cues, scholars have discovered it is necessary to blur the boundaries between verbal and non-verbal communication, and have brought the understanding to the field (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996/2007). As such, since the late 1990s, the new area of multimodality research has become a rapidly expanding interdisciplinary field in linguistics and related areas, particularly, semiotics.

The multichannel nature of language that currently stands centre stage brings to the fore the study of pun as a verbo-visual construction wherein both verbal and non-verbal elements are complementary, and cannot be considered separately from each other. The decoding of pun as a basic mechanism to create humorous situations can be made possible by applying the incongruity theory. Cognitive in nature, the incongruity theory became the dominant account of humour in psychology and philosophy and found track to cognitive linguistics (Attardo and Raskin 1991), which assumes that at the conceptual level, a pun presupposes simultaneous activation of incongruent conceptual structures (Kovalenko and Martynyuk 2021). In a verbo-visual pun the incongruent (clashing) conceptual structures creating a humorous effect are activated by both verbal and visual modes due to polysemy, homonymy, and paronymy. Incongruence is cued by the affordances of verbal and nonverbal modes – the intended expectations of the potential use of a given object/phenomenon that arises from its perceivable properties in relation to the actor’s capabilities and interests (see Oliver 2005).

Hence, a *verbo-visual pun* is a multimodal construction, wherein homonymous/paronymous/polysemantic verbal and/or visual signs trigger incongruent conceptual structures.

Puns assume multimodal appearance in online discourse and the meme as one of its inherent genres, characterized by implicitness, intertextuality, multimodal coding, ‘virality’, and ‘replicability’ (see Kuipers 2002; Shifman 2013; Wiggins and Bowers 2014). Prior to the era of modern computing, memes stood out as multimodal content that allows us to share experiences and ongoing events, while their simplicity and concise format led them to being quickly “employed for political and social debate” (Milner 2013: 65). Puns and memes allow for a moving, stimulating, enjoyable, and profound relationship as both memes and puns share humorous purposes (Dagsson Maskopp and Heller 2013) as well as intertextuality and “networked individualism” (sufficient creativity and immersion in digital culture landscape) (Zenner and Geeraerts 2018).

The combat operation in Ukraine started by Vladimir Putin on 24 February 2022 offers ripe conditions to employ memes that are highly sensitive to resonating crisis events. The present-day memescopes encompasses numerous memes portraying the war – a crisis that has brought about multiple forms of rupture, during which the normal rhythm of social, political, economic, psychological,

everyday life is halted (see Ridanpää 2020: 296). Humor, in turn, is one of the healthiest and powerful “techniques for neutralizing emotionally charged areas” that provide hope (Ridanpää 2019: 901). This said, there can easily be found convergences of crises and puns whose humorous stimuli can be a defensive weapon in information warfare. Puns help calm the fears of the public at home, give hope they can indeed defeat the enemy (see Waller 2006) and confront information of biased and misleading nature on the new frontier dubbed ‘memetic warfare’ (Stigermark 2020) / ‘memetic skirmish’ (Geisea 2015).

3. Research methodology

The main aim of this study, as stated earlier, has been to analyze the emergence and dissemination of verbo-visual puns in Internet memes portraying the Russian-Ukrainian war in order to draw conclusions on their functions as a strategy to manage the military crisis and counter misleading political messaging.

To fulfil the aim, this paper sets out three objectives: 1) to propose a working definition of verbo-visual pun that accommodates the variations and modulations attested to it; 2) to put forward an algorithm of processing verbo-visual pun meaning-making and identify its potential contribution to crisis communication and management; 3) to demonstrate how multimodal signs can extend the taxonomy of puns based on traditional ambiguity mechanisms.

I limited my search to memes that feature a combination of verbal and visual images of the military aggression. Therefore, the approach is mainly qualitative and focuses on the interaction of pictorial and written signs as they combine into multimodal puns construing the Russian-Ukrainian war. The data for the study were collected from 24 February 2022 (that signaled the outbreak of the war), until 31 August 2022 (when the aggression was ongoing), and come from advanced search via Google images based on queries including ‘meme’, ‘pun’, and ‘the Russian-Ukrainian war’. The total number of memes comprises 87 examples with 6 of them being described within this paper. The cases processed in this article include two polysemantic, two homonymic, and two paronymic verbo-visual puns. They were classified in accordance with traditional mechanisms of wordplay (linguistic pun) operationalized with reference to homonymy, po-

lysemy, and paronymy. Evidence is thus provided to show that this typology is applicable to the taxonomy of multimodal signs as well.

The memes sampled for this analysis meet the following criteria: 1) they depict Russia's military aggression in Ukraine; 2) they are complex signs whose semi-otic structure consists of a verbal text and picture(s); 3) the emerging semiotic grid reveals the incongruence of conceptual structures activated both via verbal and nonverbal modes.

The case study is conducted on the theoretical basis of the cognitive in nature incongruity theory of humor (Brône et al 2015), contributed by the vision of pun as a multimodal construction (Kovalenko and Martynyuk 2021). It uses tools of critical discourse analysis (Billig 2003) that makes effects of communicative practices during crisis communication (Coombs and Holaday 2012) visible. This approach can provide valuable insights into 'memetic warfare' communication and counterpropaganda.

In summary, the analysis comprises four steps. Firstly, I describe the semiotic structure of the meme that signals the incongruence of conceptual structures activated by verbal and visual modes. Secondly, I specify the incongruent relations cued by the affordances of both verbal and visual modes. Thirdly, I classify the verbo-visual puns detailing the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian military crisis depending on traditional mechanisms of wordplay (homonymy, polysemy, and paronymy). Lastly, I deduce what goals are pursued by the semiotic choices of Russia's military aggression in Ukraine construal and how these goals aid the informing about the military crisis and countering misleading propaganda.

4. Results and findings

In this section, following the traditional mechanisms of wordplay, I analyze, in accordance with the described algorithm, three categories of puns depicting the Russian-Ukrainian war: polysemantic, homonymic, and paronymic verbo-visual puns.

4.1. Polysemantic verbo-visual puns

This first type of verbo-visual puns is the one where the humorous stimulus is created by playing on the ambiguity of polysemous signs. Witness the following example (fig. 1):



Figure 1. Meme depicting Ukraine's claims of air support from western allies

The content of the meme (1) is made up by two modes – two pictures (the visual mode) and the simple sentence *We need air support* (the verbal mode).

The example clearly demonstrates the need for extralinguistic knowledge: during the first weeks into the war, Ukraine's government officials requested their western allies' support in the form of fighter planes and no-fly zone over the country as Russian missile strikes targeted Ukraine's major cities. The U.S. and NATO repeatedly denied the request.

Making use of various semiotic resources, the meme exploits a verbo-visual pun whose amusement is derived from the incongruity of conceptual structures manifested verbally (by the sentence *We need air support*) and visually (by means of the image of a U.N. plane with a flowing banner that reads *You are doing great...*). In this meme, which should be processed up-bottom, it is the visual component that triggers the incongruity, which has to be debugged in order to come to grips with its punning effect. The affordances of air support in wartime presuppose the provision and use of military aircraft, the establishment of the no-fly zone in the region, etc. The range of expected affordances of air support excludes sending a 'cropduster' with a flaunting banner reading *You are doing great...*. Processing both the visual and the verbal elements in unison signals

their incongruity and creates a verbo-visual pun of a polysemantic type. *Support* is a polysemous word listed as several lexical variants, among which: 1) ‘to say that you agree with an idea, group, or person, and usually to help them’, and 2) ‘to help someone by being sympathetic and kind to them during a difficult time in their life’ (LDOCE). The verbal and the visual components of the meme articulate clashing meanings of ‘air support’ whereas punning occurs.

The target of this meme is Ukraine’s ally states and their unwillingness to cross the legal line into the direct participation in the military conflict. The semiotic resources of the meme act as a tool for shaping Ukrainians’ worldview position: “We are fighting against the aggressor for the civilized world protecting universal democratic values.” The humorous portrayal serves as a means of positive persuasion to change the allies’ course of action.

Another example is worth analyzing (fig. 2):



Figure 2. Meme depicting Russian troops invading Ukraine

This meme is a word-image combination of two pictures and accompanying slogans. The upper picture is an image of the Red Square and the Kremlin, easily recognizable by their architecture. They are the major Russian landmarks visited by millions of tourists every year. The slogan at the top of the upper picture is the invitation to come and see the country (*Visit Russia*). The bottom picture is an image of Russian soldiers in full armor in Ukraine accompanied by the body text *Before Russia visits you*. The bottom visual component of the meme is of particular importance as it helps to become aware of the meaning of *Before Russia visits you* where *Russia* metonymically refers to its army.

This meme (2) is a nice example of a polysemantic pun exploiting the meanings of the verb *visit*: 1) 'go and spend time in a place for pleasure', and 2) 'go to a place as part of your official job' (LDOCE). The verb *visit* unmistakably creates a punning effect, yet we are aware of this only after we look at the bottom picture: the affordances of a joyride to see a world-known landmark surely do not presuppose coming to another country in order to suppress, kill, and annex. Lexical ambiguity resulting from the two meanings of *visit*, additionally cued visually (by both the top and the bottom pictures), creates a punning effect.

To make clear the strategic purpose of this pun and its role in crisis communication, I have to go back to the events that took place earlier. In October 2021, the Russian Federation started drawing troops to Ukrainian border. Shortly after that, the press warned about an impending attack. The Russian Federation officials, however, denied a possible attack numerous times.² Yet ... on 24 February 2022, first missiles were sent to Ukraine from Russia and Belarus.

As such, the verbo-visual pun in (2) fulfils a vital mission of portraying Putin as a liar (thus destroying his image as a reliable partner) and a war criminal (therefore justifying his army's destruction in self-defense and retaliation).

4.2. Homonymic verbo-visual puns

This second type of verbo-visual puns is the one where the humorous stimulus is created by playing on the ambiguity of homonymous signs. Witness the following example (fig. 3):

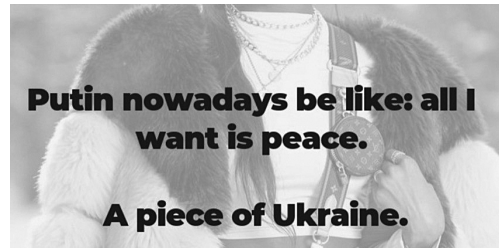


Figure 3. Meme reciting Vladimir Putin's quote about wanting (a) peace / piece in / of Ukraine

² See: <https://www.dw.com/ru/putin-vral-chto-vojnny-s-ukrainoj-ne-budet-hronologija-obmana/a-60904218>.

This meme's message is encoded both visually and verbally. Its linguistic component is a complex sentence (the top text *Putin nowadays be like*³: *all I want is peace*) and the noun phrase that follows (the bottom text *A piece of Ukraine*). The verbal part of the meme includes a traditional wordplay mechanism employing the ambiguity of homophones *peace* versus *piece*. The visual element of the meme is a photo of a young woman dressed to advantage showing the upper part of her. The woman in the photo epitomizes Ukraine and its riches, and anchors the incongruity expressed verbally.

Hence, the meme (3) exploits a verbo-visual pun wherein incongruent conceptual structures are activated verbally (by the lexeme *peace*) as well as verbally and visually (by the lexeme *piece* and the picture of the upper part of a woman or a piece of Ukraine). 'Being in peace' is associated with feeling happy, calm, and not worried, enjoying quiet and pleasant events (to name just a few affordances), which is in contradiction to the idea of being ripped apart.

This verbo-visual pun is a good example of Putin's gaslighting (a word coined by P. Hamilton in his 1938 play (Hamilton 1938)) – the way that an authority figure purposefully manipulates the truth in order to control the psychological state of others. By making use of the pun, the semiotic resources of the meme confer the evaluative function and speak the truth about the oppressor and his real aims. The pun's ridicule-joking at the expense of the Russian president imputes the responsibility for the moral violation to the individual and damages his social status in the minds of others (see Veatch 1998). By doing this, ridicule becomes a defensive weapon: laughing at the enemy during wartime helps one become less fearful and more optimistic of the victory (Waller 2006).

The following (fig. 4) is another true example of a homonymic multimodal pun rendered visually and verbally:

³ *be like* is a slang term typically used in urban ghettos and popularized in Internet memes to mean 'to act like, or appear in a certain way, to say, or to offer up an excuse' (see: <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=be%20like>).



Figure 4. Meme depicting Vladimir Putin and maps of Ukraine

The semiotic structure of this meme is comprised of two photos of Vladimir Putin dressed in the Red Army uniform and two pictures showing the map of Ukraine: one painted in the colors of Ukraine's flag and the other – in the colors of the USSR flag (the visual component of the meme). The verbal mode of the meme, that complements its semiotic structure, relays three words: *COMMUNISM*, *Ukraine*, and *Ourkraine* (the latter being a nonce word).

The meme (4) exploits a verbo-visual pun whose verbal component is the word-play of the homophones *U* as part of the name of *Ukraine* and the personal pronoun *you* that transmits the message that Ukraine belongs to its people. The sender substitutes the initial *U* in *Ukraine* with the possessive pronoun *Our* coining the nonce *Ourkraine*. This resolves the incongruity of the semantics of the meme's verbal component and its visual element, which serves as a limited visual aid for processing the pun. The image of V. Putin exuding pleasure from realizing (in his dreams) the fact that his ambitions of joining Ukraine to the Russian Federation as the successor state of the Soviet Union have been satisfied (in his dreams again): "What was yours has become ours." The debugging of the pun is supported by its visual component. In the upper left picture, the leader of the Russian Federation, covering his face with his palm, demonstrates the

rejection of Ukraine in its current existence. In the lower left photo, he appears pleased with the fact that Ukraine has been ‘repainted’.⁴

The pun is targeted at V. Putin who ‘took a creative attitude to truth’ by calling war a special military operation. By revealing the true reasons for V. Putin’s attack on Ukraine, this meme acts as a weapon in the information warfare co-utteracting the Russian Federation propaganda: Ukrainians and the global community should be aware that Putin and his cronies are universal evil, whose beliefs are disparate from democratic values. Their actions should be subject to uncompromising ridicule as a defensive weapon that can help calm the fears of the public at home and give hope of defeating the enemy (Waller 2006).

4.3. Paronymic verbo-visual puns

This third type of verbo-visual puns is the one where the humorous stimulus is created by playing on the ambiguity of paronymous signs. Below I am focusing on one of the examples (fig. 5):

Darth Invader

The invaders in Russia
invading Ukraine be like:



Figure 5. Meme depicting Vladimir Putin as Darth [In]Vader

Another ‘be like’ meme (5) is a verbo-visual construction comprised of a pictorial element – a photo of Vladimir Putin in ominous black armor and an Imperial storm trooper behind him (which is an external reference to *Star Wars*) – and

⁴ This meme (4) is a reference to the so-called Drakeposting – the practice of posting reaction images and still shots from the music video of Drake’s 2015 hit single *Hotline Bling* (see other examples: <https://en.meming.world/wiki/Drakeposting>).

a linguistic component – the top text *The invaders in Russia invading Ukraine be like* as well as the bottom inscription *DARTH INVADER*. The pictorial mode alludes to the general extralinguistic context of the meme: one of the most prominent figures in *Star Wars*, as is known, is Darth Vader a.k.a Anakin Skywalker – the most powerful Jedi in the galaxy who later took the dark side of the pathway. The verbal component (the inscription *DARTH INVADER*) of the meme cues a paronymic pun of *Vader* versus *invader* with the pictorial element (the image of Vladimir Putin in the costume of Darth Vader) supporting the incongruence.

The affordances of the pictorial mode – the deeds expected from an epic hero – demonstrate incongruity with the verbal mode of the meme – the invader as a vile, shameless, and abusive intruder. The punning exploited by the meme is duplicated through a semiotic lens by highlighting the prefix *in-* (in *invader*) by contrasting (white) color.

This pun is a well-aimed ridicule of Vladimir Putin and his army who have debunked the myth about the world's second most powerful armed force by raping women, stealing washing machines, doghouses, and used underwear, relieving themselves in people's beds and crockery⁵. They are deprived of dignity, which is comforting and positively pleasurable for the recipient of the meme making it a defensive weapon that helps calm the fears of the 'victim' and give hope to indeed defeat the enemy (see Waller 2006).

Another example may also serve to illustrate a paronymic verbo-visual pun (fig. 6):

5 See: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/apr/28/russia-ukraine-emergency-contraception-amid-rape-reports>; <https://www.slidstvo.info/english-stories/russians-call-relatives-and-tell-about-the-stolen-gold-iphones-and-the-committed-rapes/>; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/18/ukraine-executions-torture-during-russian-occupation>.

Joe Standing Tall on the Ucrane Beaches

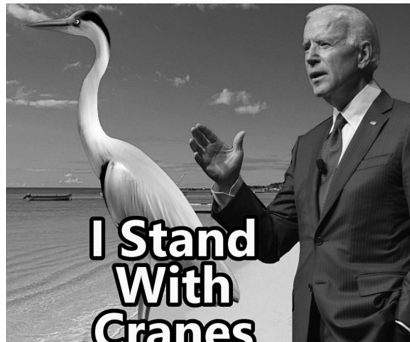


Figure 6. Meme about USA support of Ukraine

Figure 6 is a meme with verbal and visual components. The picture that composes the meme (6) visualizes Joe Biden, the US president, standing on a beach. Next to him is a crane. The verbal part reads *Joe standing tall on the Ucrane beaches* (the top text) and *I stand with cranes* (the bottom text). The relation between the visual and language here makes it possible to construe a pun playing on the ambiguity of paronymous signs *crane(s)* (presented verbally and pictorially) versus *Ucrane* (an intentionally misspelled name of the country Ukraine).

The US united with its allies and partners worldwide to support Ukraine in response to Russia's premediated, unprovoked, and unjustified war against Ukrainians. As such, the affordances of the verbal mode (the simple sentence *Joe standing tall on the Ucrane beaches*, which unequivocally hints at the United States' support of Ukraine) – the actions expected from US president, like giving sufficient and timely military assistance, recognizing the aggressor as a state sponsor of terrorism, etc.) – demonstrate incongruity with the visual mode anchored by Joe Biden's quote *I stand with cranes*.

The target of this meme as a strategic tool of information warfare is the states that support Ukraine in its resistance to the Russian Federation military aggression (the United States of America in particular): the meme mocks Ukraine's allies to make them announce and provide a substantial assistance package.

5. Conclusions

This article has followed the dissemination of Internet memes that employ verbo-pictorial response to Russia's military aggression in Ukraine. More specifically, it has traced how puns expressed in the visual channel accompanied by linguistic expressions in the polycode memetic space are crucial for conceptualizing the war and what the value of the processed ambiguity to counteracting pro-Moscow messages and disinformation is.

When Russian-Ukrainian war turned round the corner and entered the most active phase, the time was ripe for memes depicting the military crisis to appear. They employed numerous puns whose interpretation presupposes the identification of verbo-pictorial inconsistency evoked by homonymous, polysemantic or paronymic signs. There appear four subtypes of verbo-visual puns: 1) wherein the incongruent conceptual structures are activated one verbally, while the second one visually (as in fig. 1); 2) wherein the clashing conceptual structures are activated one verbally, whereas the second one verbally and pictorially (as in fig. 3, 6); 3) wherein the irrelevant conceptual structures are triggered, one visually while the second one verbally and visually (as in fig. 5); 4) wherein both incongruent structures are surfaced verbally and visually (as in fig. 2). The visual components of the puns processed reveal a special significance. They trigger the incongruity (as in fig. 1 and 6) or anchor the incongruity expressed verbally (as in fig. 2-5), that has to be debugged to come to grips with the punning effect as well as serve as additional aid to express attitudes. Additionally, the memes' imaginary can signal incongruity in a concise manner and bring a plethora of analogies. This makes information visualization a useful systemic context for understanding the punning effect.

Solving the ambiguity by debugging the error enables the recipient to get the joke whose ridicule turns out to be a defensive strategy in crisis communication. Partying with memes verbo-visual puns approach warfighting with an alternative mindset.

6. Suggestions

In this current article, I focused on puns employing traditional ambiguity mechanisms triggered verbally and visually, their decoding and functions contributing to the realization of crisis communication goals. Further research can pursue the study of each of these mechanisms construing other types of crisis events as well as their impact on receivers' evaluations of their effectiveness.

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Jezično-vizualna igra riječi u memetičkom ratovanju protiv ruske agresije u Ukrajini

Sažetak

Šaljivi *meme* naoružani riječima i slikama postali su oružje „masovnoga poremećaja” u ekstremnim krizama. To poziva na ispitivanje načina na koji *meme* koji detaljno opisuju rusko-ukrajinsku vojnu krizu koriste jezično-vizualne igre riječi kao strateško oruđe informacijskoga rata za suprotstavljanje Putinovoj vojnoj agresiji i ofenzivnoj propagandi. Ovaj članak predlaže interdisciplinarni predložak za analizu igre riječi oslanjajući se na multimodalnu društvenu semiotiku, kognitivnu lingvistiku, kritičku analizu diskursa i analizu kriznoga komuniciranja. Podatci prikupljeni za istraživanje sadržavaju 87 primjera *meme* o rusko-ukrajinskom ratu koji koriste jezično-vizualne igre riječi sa šest slučajeva opisanih u radu. Jezično-vizualne igre riječi klasificirane su u skladu s tradicionalnim mehanizmima igre riječima (homonimija, polisemija i paronimija) za koje se čini da su primjenjivi i na tipologiju multimodalnih znakova. Rezultati istraživanja otkrivaju kognitivne i semiotičke pokretače igre riječi kao i njihov potencijal da posluže kao alat za generiranje javne reakcije na rusku vojnu agresiju u Ukrajini i postizanje zadanih ciljeva kriznoga komuniciranja.

Keywords: Russian-Ukrainian war, pun, meme, multimodality, crisis communication, affordance.

Ključne riječi: rusko-ukrajinski rat, igra riječi, mem, multimodalnost, krizna komunikacija, pristupačnost.