

THE PSYCHOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER THROUGH MILITARY PERSONNEL'S CREATIVE WRITING

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Summary

The aim of this paper is to study the linguistic markers of manifestation in the modern non-institutional military-poetic discourse of consequences of combat stress, which the Ukrainian army servicemen experienced during military operations. This study focuses on an integrated approach combining pragmatic and cognitive approaches in the framework of discourse analysis. Analysis of the military-poetic discourse has proved that combat stress takes a toll in the poetry of military personnel in the form of signs of the emotional and psychological state, which is taken as post-traumatic stress disorder. These signs are: reference to recurring disturbing dreams (nightmares) and obsessive troubling flashbacks relating to war; a subconscious desire to forget what has happened; persistent negative emotional and psychological state, which manifests itself in negative feelings, moods and emotions such as: depression, anger, rage, hatred, mistrust, resentment, humiliation, letdown, confusion from not understanding what is happening; persistent inability to experience positive emotions; depersonalization; feeling of isolation, alienation from other people; persistent and exaggerated expectations from others, which manifests itself in negative beliefs and/or blaming yourself and others. To protect their psyche from the destructive effects of a traumatic situation, servicemen use such self-regulation strategy as involvement in artistic creativity, in which poetry works as a type of social and psychological rehabilitation. The rewind technique, psychodrama and cognitive restructuring are the most essential elements of self-regulation strategies used by the participants in the Joint Forces Operation.

Keywords: military-poetic discourse, psycholinguistics, self-regulation strategies, combat stress.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Modern Ukrainian non-institutional military discourse. Preconditions for the evolution and spread of modern Ukrainian non-institutional military discourse have been formed on social networks. In the Internet communication the discursive dimensions of non-institutional military discourse were integrated with the expressiveness and expressiveness of online discourse (Khraban, 2019). Having formed due to a combination of different types of discourses, non-institutional military discourse has acquired a holistic form with special characteristics, which indicates difference from other types of discourse. Thus, for the reason of tense military situation in eastern Ukraine there is a constant reflection of military realities in the modern Ukrainian non-institutional military discourse. Experience of stressful event is a factor for transformation of the semantic sphere of an individual and creating a fundamentally different socio-psychological situation (Campise et al, 2006), the projection of which is reflected in the poetry of the participants in the Joint Forces Operation. The negative consequences of

psychotrauma having fixed in the personal structures of military personnel, integrate into a holistic symptom (Armenta et al, 2018) and then manifest themselves in the poetry in the form of a “clinical picture of post-traumatic stress disorder as a socially oriented phenomenon” (Blinov, 2016: 175). The study of consequences of combat stress through poetry acquires special relevance in connection with the preventive and rehabilitative significance of this problem.

1.2. Analysis of recent research and publications. This article is based on research papers of B. Proskurin (Proskurin, 2008) (the details on classification of means and forms of psychologism in fiction are described); A. Ulanov (Ulanov, 2014) (the systemic-structural and functional-diachronic description of the Russian military discourse as a socially conditioned organization of the military personnel’s speech activity was developed); A. Makhov, D. Khramchenko (Makhov & Khramchenko, 2017) (the specific functional and pragmatic features of the American military discourse in the context of media language were studied); E. Kutkova (Kutkovaya, 2014) (the specifics of understanding emotions in discursive psychology are considered), R. Cowie, R. Cornelius (Cowie & Cornelius, 2003) (emotiveness as the property of language to express person’s psychological states and experiences was characterized) and others. *The aim of this paper* is to study the linguistic markers of manifestation in the modern non-institutional military-poetic discourse of consequences of combat stress, which the Ukrainian army servicemen experienced during military operations.

2. Materials & Methods

2.1. Discursive approach to the study. Since “the image of war is always constructed discursively” (Ishchenko, 2007: 22), procedure of conducting this research is based on discourse analysis. In the study the military discourse is considered as “a special type of the military personnel’s world view speech organization in which such features are emphasized: correlation with military environment and military speech topics; specific military chronotopicity; intentionality; integrity and continuity; coherency; military factual informational content; intertextuality; credibility of military-theoretical and military-historical sources; anthropocentricity of the military world view” (Ulanov, 2014). This study aims at non-institutional military discourse as “a special type of military discourse organization that includes an emotional-evaluative and colloquial description of military events, realities and persons, and characterized by active communicative interaction” (Ulanov, 2014). Since “discourse is a social practice” (Dirven et al, 2005), military discourse belongs, first of all, to the social dimension of war (Ishchenko, 2007: 22). Therefore, we consider it is expedient to use a pragmatic approach to discourse analysis in this research. It is with this understanding, any statement is viewed as a product of activities of social agents that are always engaged in social interactions and structures, a specific political and cultural-historical situation, that is, social action (Ogienko, 2012: 100). On the other hand, social practices are characterized by a cognitive dimension (knowledge, opinions, beliefs, norms, values, stereotypes, etc.) (Ishchenko, 2007: 22), so such concepts as “collective memory”, “imagined community” are integral categories of cognitive processes (Heer et al, 2003). This fact obliges us to turn to cognitive approach within the framework of critical discourse analysis. Such approach to discourse analysis allows to define it as “such method for studying the nature of language, which considers the social world through researching the features of cognitive transaction of knowledge between participants in the discourse” (Alkushin, 2013: 174). The military-discursive area is characterized by an intense interaction of military-discursive phenomena with phenomena of other discourses. It is in large part due to a chain of non-linguistic factors and expressed at the structural level (Sokolova, 2014: 9).

Interference as a result of an influence of the basic (or dominant) discourse and the reverse influence from the outside discourses in a new sociocultural situation (Sokolova, 2014: 26) contributes to formation of genre-stylistic varieties of military discourse, one of which is military-poetic discourse. Emotional discourse contributes to the interference of different types of discourses, while acting as some assimilating factor (Zhu, 2016). Emotions revealed by servicemen who have experienced combat stress define such ways of their speaking about things, which help to convey their assessments of events in relation to the normative conditions of the situation (Kutkovaya, 2014), and the analysis of emotional and psychological states revealed in military-poetic discourse allows us to consider a social event from the perspective of its participant, analyze its attitude to the event and display how the structure of the event determines the ways of experiencing it (Perlovsky, 2009), as well as to specify person's specific emotions, to understand the essence of psychological phenomena (Khraban & Khraban, 2019).

2.2. *Materials to conduct this research* are poetry of the participants in the Joint Forces Operation that is posted on Facebook social media accounts "Poems of ATO. Soldier", "Songs created in the zone of Anti-Terrorist Operation".

3. Results & Discussions

3.1. *Features of modern Ukrainian military-poetic discourse.* A distinguishing feature of the modern Ukrainian military-poetic discourse is monologues, in which an author is caught up in his own world. A first-person narrative when the author expresses only his own point of view, talks about himself, and also when the narration becomes more and more like a confession, is perceived as an eyewitness testimony. It brings reader closer to the author, allows to experience a sense of involvement in described events, to feel more deeply the emotional and psychological state of the author. This situation is disclosed in the modern Ukrainian military-poetic discourse as "a consistent characteristic of mental activity, which is most acutely evident in correlation between mental processes and reflection of reality, the prior state and psychological traits of the individual" (Blinov, 2016: 28). Combat stress always takes a toll even if military personnel are not injured. The reason for this is that a prolonged stay in life-threatening circumstances, a significant emotional impact, mental and physical stress, psychosomatic exhaustion lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (Blinov, 2016: 6). The human psyche induces atypical for peacetime negative states of mental activity as a normal reaction to abnormal circumstances (McNally, 2005). Analysis of the military-poetic discourse has proved that in the poetry of military personnel who experienced combat stress there are signs of the emotional and psychological state, which is taken as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The following markers were highlighted:

3.2. *Symptoms of cognitive biases.* They are:

– reference to recurring disturbing dreams (nightmares) relating to war: *And again, in the middle of the night I feel uneasy, I hear shots, groans and the voices of those who perished in that war* (FB). Two frequently recurring large themes of nightmares stand out in military-poetic discourse. First, the author is in danger or he apprehends it: *I dozed off and saw a dream, one and the same for the umpteenth time: instead of the sky there is tanks that are crossing our trench* (FB). This script indicates a traumatic experience of fear: the individual is in danger; he needs to protect himself. The second theme relates to death of fellow soldiers: *But after war, at night many of us will often have dreams how we close our battle friends' eyes with our palm not hiding tears that arise from emotional suffering* (FB). This script is an indicator of a traumatic experience of helplessness and/or guilt, which is often related to situation, in which the author survived and his comrades perished;

– reference to recurring obsessive troubling flashbacks: *I remember our dugout, how we are sitting in the dark, how the fired tracer rounds are filling the whole sky* (FB). The author describes painful experiences in real time as if an event from the past happens again. The military man plunges into his experiences, detaches from reality. Everything that jumps to the forefront of his mind is not controlled by him and causes a dreamlike feeling: *My psychologist, don't shrink me since I haven't returned from the war yet* (FB). The military man cannot imagine his existence without the situation of extreme danger in the war: *I am toiling along the streets to nowhere with only one purpose in mind, that is to not feel like fighting* (FB), but memories about it are accompanied by feelings of horror, anxiety, anguish. Such contradiction disintegrates the personality; it can be a trigger for his aggressive actions or can drive to suicide: Having accustomed to danger we plunge into war concealing our grievances, on the verge of sleep and suicide (FB);

– a subconscious desire to forget what has happened. This can manifest itself as a desire to return to pre-war times: *Take me to my childhood, please, mom!!! Where my friends are young and still alive* (FB).

3.3. Negative consequences for cognitive ability and emotional-psychological state:

– persistent negative emotional and psychological state, which manifests itself in negative feelings, moods and emotions such as: depression – *I want you, who are empty and dead inside, tired and hungry, not shaved for a long time, with injured leg and extinct look, to return alive from the front* (FB); anger, rage, hatred – *I hate war, whose wounds cannot be healed by the time* (FB); mistrust – *there is no truth in war, there are no sinless and holy people* (FB); resentment – *We are not numbers with two zeros. We are not reported figures* (FB); humiliation – *I am a prisoner of war, "ape", "body"; many aliases have been made up for me* (FB); letdown – *Do not let me die in despair, in loss of purpose* (FB); confusion from not understanding what is happening – *Why is this happening in the world? Maybe, someone has cast spells against us?* (FB); apathy – *Neither strength nor strong can heal me... And alcohol is useless* (FB). The fear of death should be separately mentioned from the perspective of a persistent negative emotional state. Death scene in war causes fear. First of all, fear is relevant to his own death. The search for immortality becomes a remedy against the fear of death, as reflected in two ways. The first way is characterized by the fact that the awareness of mortality prompts a person to quest for the meaning of his death – *I did not die for someone to drink vodka in the evening* (FB). It is characteristic for modern Ukrainian military-poetic discourse that death becomes a moral imperative – *You should know that your sacrifice for the sake of people is not in vain* (FB). In this case, the military man seeks immortality in the memory of the living – *After all, we stay alive until we are forgotten* (FB). The second way is belief in immortality at the level of religious consciousness *I went to heaven from a cold trench* (FB);

– persistent inability to experience positive emotions (anhedonia), that is a condition associated with reduced cognitive reactivity. In some cases, a person does not understand his emotional and psychological state and does not know how to cope with it: *Probably, this is fatigue, I do feel like giving up. And I have nothing to do but to surrender and drink dying of boredom* (FB). But some poems prove that a military man is aware of what is going on with him and try to find a way out of the state of anhedonia: *Teach me to forgive! To forgive when it hurts badly and excruciatingly... Teach me to love! To love so that feelings push through my veins* (FB);

– depersonalization (a feeling of disconnection or detaching from one's self). In such cases the military men often characterize his emotional and psychological state as "death in the soul": *We all have died here but someone is dead for real, and someone is dead in his soul* (FB).

In poems the military men often tells about feelings of alienation and separation from their own body, they feel themselves already to be killed. The realization of their life goals are no longer associated with them themselves but with imaginary persons;

– feeling of isolation, alienation from other people. It manifests itself in distrust of human sincerity and unselfishness. At the level of social relations, the emotional and psychological state of a military man is characterized by pessimism, lack of loyalty, feelings of bitterness and hostility to others: *My old friends have become aliens, I have realized that they are not friends, they have their own affairs and needs, and they do not need me at all... I almost hate the pit-like city* (FB);

– persistent and exaggerated expectations from others, which manifests itself in negative beliefs and/or blaming yourself and others: *And the earth would have drunk less blood if the war had been one and the same for all* (FB).

3.4. *Creative writing as a psychological self-regulation.* To protect their psyche from the destructive effects of a traumatic situation, servicemen often intuitively seek for increasing their personal adaptive potential, restoring the functional state of their bodies and reducing emotional stress by means of psychological self-regulation. One of self-regulation strategies is involvement in artistic creativity, in which poetry is not limited to verbal expression of a military man's emotional and psychological state but also works as a type of social and psychological rehabilitation (*Grandjean & Scherer, 2006*). The analysis of the military-poetic discourse has proved that the rewind technique, psychodrama and cognitive restructuring are the most essential elements of self-regulation strategies used by the participants in the Joint Forces Operation. Rewind technique is based on repetition of delving into the past to emotionally rich memories until they no longer cause a high degree of discomfort. A military man brings his anxiety to the surface and gradually the devastating power of his memories subsides: *Someone counted the explosions, someone whispered a prayer, someone's hair became touched with grey, someone asked to smoke. Someone pressed himself against ground as if in prayer. A very mature man really wanted to his mum's* (FB).

Psychodrama itself is a role-playing game with an improvised plot. In the poetry of Ukrainian servicemen who have experienced combat stress, internal monologues are abundant. Imaginary scenes from the past and probable future events are played out in these monologues. The purpose of psychodrama is to bring military man's inner feelings to the surface, get in touch with his past and restore his personal integrity: *I saw kindness in the riflescope – a man was saving a dog. Without fear he plunged into an ice hole, he was not afraid of the deep. He didn't think it was no-man's-land, he was a soft target on the ice. I was looking in the riflescope and hesitated to shoot...* (FB).

Turning to cognitive restructuring, also known as cognitive reframing, a military man learns to control his own dysfunctional cognitive processes, to replace irrational negative thoughts with more realistic or positive ones in order to pre-empt the impact of stress and/or transform the experience of stress: *I believe that Ukraine will wake up, the cherries will bloom again in the gardens, the country will recover from the trauma of war, all houses will be rebuilt here* (FB).

4. Conclusions

A distinguishing feature of the modern Ukrainian military-poetic discourse is monologues, in which an author is caught up in his own world. Analysis of the military-poetic discourse has proved that combat stress takes a toll in the poetry of military personnel in the form of signs of the emotional and psychological state, which is taken as post-traumatic stress

disorder. These signs are: reference to recurring disturbing dreams (nightmares) and obsessive troubling flashbacks relating to war; a subconscious desire to forget what has happened; persistent negative emotional and psychological state, which manifests itself in negative feelings, moods and emotions such as: depression, anger, rage, hatred, mistrust, resentment, humiliation, letdown, confusion from not understanding what is happening; persistent inability to experience positive emotions; depersonalization; feeling of isolation, alienation from other people; persistent and exaggerated expectations from others, which manifests itself in negative beliefs and/or blaming yourself and others. To protect their psyche from the destructive effects of a traumatic situation, servicemen use such self-regulation strategy as involvement in artistic creativity, in which poetry works as a type of social and psychological rehabilitation. The rewind technique, psychodrama and cognitive restructuring are the most essential elements of self-regulation strategies used by the participants in the Joint Forces Operation.

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