

Immigration Discourse in Contemporary Russian Internet Media from a Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis Perspective

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Abstract: This paper examines the immigration discourse in contemporary Russian internet media. This study aims at illuminating how contemporary Russian internet immigration discourse conceptualises immigrants, using different semiotic modes (not only texts but also visuals). In order to achieve the main goal, textual and visual materials published in the Russian internet media are analysed. The methodology used to conduct research was based on critical discourse analysis, multimodal discourse analysis and cognitive linguistics. The image of immigrants in the analysed material consists of five facets: biological, national, legal, economic and martial ones. In the biological aspect, immigrants are portrayed as people who look different to the indigenous population, have a different skin colour, Asian facial features. The national facet stresses the difference in nationality, even otherness, of immigrants. The legal facet emphasizes immigrants' involvement in murders, rapes and robberies. As for the economic facet, immigrants are portrayed as a threat to the country's economic development. In the martial aspect, migrants are depicted as occupants and invaders. Authors of the analysed texts use visual discrimination strategies: representation of immigrants as agents of negatively valued actions, discriminatory stereotyping, collectivisation, and aggregation. The analysed Russian internet mass media paints a negative picture of immigrants, especially those from Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Keywords: Immigration, Russian internet media, discrimination, multimodal analysis, critical discourse analysis.

INTRODUCTION

There are four basic groups of immigrants in the Russian society: (1) representatives of ethnic groups of Central Asia and the Caucasus (for instance Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Armenia); (2) immigrants from other Commonwealth of Independent States' member states and associate members (for example Ukraine and Belarus); (3) immigrants from the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania); and (4)

immigrants from the Asia-Pacific region (China and Vietnam). The chart below illustrates the number of immigrants from foreign countries who have arrived in Russia since 2005. The number of immigrants who came to Russia in 2015 tripled in comparison to 2005. The blue line shows changes in the number of migrants coming to Russia. It shows a considerable growth of this number.

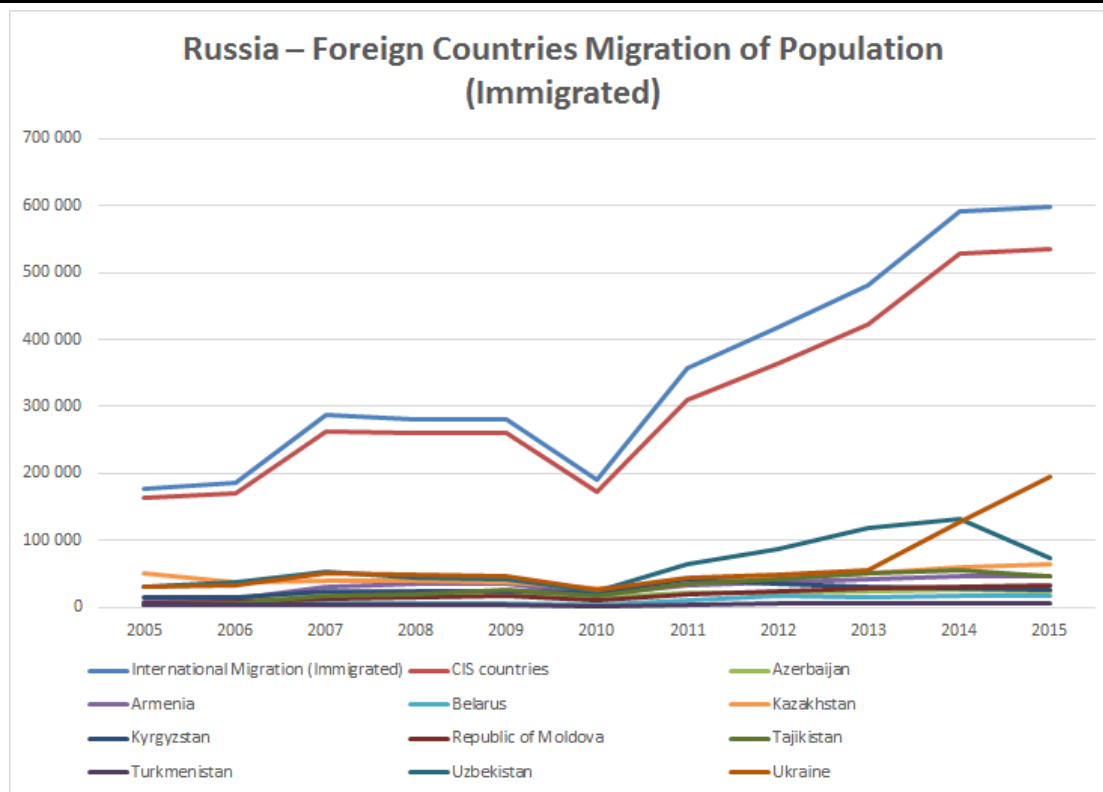


Chart-1: Source: Federal State Statistics Service, Russian Federation

This increase of immigrants evokes a great deal of debates in the Russian internet immigration discourse, that is, part of the political and social discourse. The immigration discourse is understood as a specific and distinct communicative practice that accompanies the phenomenon of immigration [1]. In contemporary Russia, there are two types of discourse of immigration. One of them is called “xenophobic discourse” or “discourse of prejudice”, and the second – “neoliberal discourse” [2]. Natalya Zvereva, in her work on immigration discourse in the contemporary Russian press, has analysed these two types of discourse and strategies of representation of “foreigners”. The image of immigrants in contemporary Russian media was also the subject of a study by Tatyana Skrebtsova [3], reconstructing the stereotype of immigrants in the Russian media. Her research has shown that immigrants which evoke the most negative connotations are those from the Caucasus and Central Asia. Nonetheless, immigrants from Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova are more readily tolerated [3]. According to her study, immigrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia were portrayed with the use of lexemes with a negative meaning. For instance, mass media highlighted that immigrants from these regions had slovenly appearance and many had dangerous diseases, such as TB or HIV [3]. A lack of education and professional qualifications, poor knowledge of the Russian language and a lack of respect for Russian local rules, habits and culture are also revealed in Skrebtsova’s study [3]. The researcher emphasises also that Russian mass media

paints an image of immigrants as an ethnic criminal group involved in drug trafficking, robberies, smuggling, and terrorist activities. This picture supports the argument that immigrants create problems and exacerbate the already difficult social situation in the Russian cities and villages.

OBJECTIVE, MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study aims at illuminating how contemporary Russian internet immigration discourse conceptualises immigrants, using different semiotic modes (not only texts but also visual). As I understand conceptualisation, “[i]t involves imagery in the broadest sense of the word: ways of making sense, of imposing meaning” [4]. The originality of this work is that the analysed texts had complex semiotic structures.

To achieve the main goal, textual and visual materials published in the Russian internet media were analysed [5]. Fifty randomly chosen articles (with pictures) on immigration issues were analysed. They came from the Russian internet mass media. This paper includes an analysis of selected extracts from sixteen texts that also contain visual materials. The articles were published between 2005 and 2016. 2005 was the year of the first “Russian march” (*Russkiy marsh*) that was a nationalist public demonstration under the “It’s our country” slogan. This march was held on November 4th, the Day of National Unity in the Russian Federation. Among the participants was a group called the Movement Against Illegal Immigration.

The methodology used to conduct my research is based on critical discourse analysis [6-8], multimodal discourse analysis [9-14] and cognitive linguistics [15].

According to Norman Fairclough's contention, texts in contemporary society are increasingly multi-semiotic, i.e. they combine language (verbal signs) with other semiotic modes (aural and visual) [6]. Kay L. O'Halloran and Bradley A. Smith argue that multimodal analysis encompasses the exploration of communication in all its forms, but it is particularly concerned with texts which contain the interaction and integration of two or more semiotic resources [13]. By looking at the formal elements and structures of design – colour, perspective, framing and composition, we can examine the ways in which images communicate meaning [9]. Furthermore, visual material does not play only a demonstrative role, but it is a meaning-making part of discourse. Discourses, as David Machin claims, are communicated through different kinds of semiotic resources and modes [16]. Texts create meaning not only through language but also through visual features such as images, colours, the layout of pages [16].

Teun A. van Dijk outlines that critical discourse analysis is a type of analytical research for discourse that mainly studies "the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" [17]. As Norman Fairclough claims, the aim of CDA is to study language in its relation to power and ideology in three separate forms of analysis:

- Analysis of (spoken or written) language texts;
- Analysis of discourse practice (processes of text production, distribution and consumption);
- Analysis of discursive events as instances of

sociocultural practice [6].

This approach was chosen for my research because immigration discourse in the Russian mass media involves processes of social inequality, discrimination and symbolic power dominance which are revealed in language texts and other semiotic modes. As Rick Iedema stresses "our semiotic landscape is becoming more and more populated with complex social and cultural discourse practices" [18].

RESULTS

The image of immigrants in the analysed material, as a result of processes of conceptualisation, consists of five facets, i.e. ways in which immigrants are depicted [15]. The names of the facets reflect a semantic analysis of the texts and visual material. These are biological, national, legal, economic and martial facets [19].

In the biological aspect, immigrants are portrayed in the following way: they look different to the indigenous population; they have a different skin colour, Asian facial features, gold teeth. The biological aspect is reinforced by pictures showing immigrants as people who differ from Russians in terms of appearance, for example, skin colour.

The second facet is nationality. It stresses difference in nationality or even otherness of immigrants. The mass media portrays immigrants as ethnically alien: they are replacing indigenous Russians; they are culturally alien; they create culturally alien communities; they do not speak Russian at all (or their Russian is poor), and they are connected with Islam. These two facets – the biological and national one – are presented in the picture below.



Photograph-1: AiF 10Sep2015

The third facet is the legal one. Russian internet media uses this facet to emphasise that immigrants are involved in murders, rapes and robberies; they are smugglers, drug dealers, terrorists; they steal and cheat. Immigrants are depicted being accompanied by policemen or the Federal Migration Service (*ФМС*). It aims to show that immigrants have

problems with the law and they are involved in illegal activities. The visual material also often refers to this aspect (cf. photographs 2-5). A frequent way to present immigrants is to show them in the company of Federal Migration Service agents. It is worth referring here to the visual discrimination strategy described by Theo van Leeuwen as representation as agents of negatively

valued actions [20-22]. The co-occurrence of the image of immigrants and the migration service agents triggers

suspicion of illegal activity of migrants and evokes negative connotations.



Photograph-2: AiF 3Sep2015



Photograph-3: Pro Gorod 8Feb2014



Photograph-4: KP 5Jun2014



Photograph 5: KP 15Nov2012

The fourth facet is economic. Immigrants are portrayed as a threat to the country's economic development. The following descriptions appeared in the analysed texts: immigrants are a cause of economic stagnation; they are unskilled labour; they transfer money home and they steal jobs from native people.

The visual material contains references to the economic facet as well (cf. photographs 6-9). These are six pictures excerpted from different media that show immigrants as "cheap labour force". Immigrants are presented with building tools: a brush, a painting roller, and a broom. They are portrayed as performing physical

work that is less prestigious than the jobs of indigenous Russians. This way of presenting immigrants can be referred to a strategy described by Theo van Leeuwen as discriminatory stereotyping [20-22]. Presenting immigrants as only physical labourers fixes the image

of ‘migrant workers’ that is called in the analysed discourse as *застарбайтеры* (*gastarbaytery*), which has negative connotations in the contemporary Russian language.



Photograph-6: JustMedia 23Sep2013



Photograph-7: Kolyma 23Dec2016



Photograph-8: KP 28Oct2014



Photograph-9: MK 26Nov2012

The fifth facet is martial. Immigrants are portrayed as occupants and invaders. They come in huge numbers and form units similar to the military. The visual material also includes this aspect (cf. photographs 10, 11, 12 and the set of photographs 1). Migrants are represented as crowds wearing dark clothes, with hats on their heads. It evokes negative connotations: migrants are dangerous groups, aggressive people, like invaders. This strategy can be called as collectivisation

[8, 12], i.e. the nomination of social actors by mass nouns, and aggregation [8, 12], i.e. the statistical quantifying of groups of migrants. There are nominations in analysed text such as *понаехали* (*ponayekhali*) 'they came in huge numbers', *пооставались* (*poostavalis*) 'they stayed', *все больше* (*vsë bol'she*) 'more and more', *поток* (*potok*) 'migration stream' that aim at underlining a danger posed by the great numbers of immigrants.



Photograph-10: Stringer 6Feb2013



Photograph-11: AiF 10Sep2015



Photograph-12: AiF 16Apr2015



Set of photographs-1: AiF 18Dec2014, Interfax 16Oct2013, OM-Saratov 3Feb2014, Telgrafist 14Apr2015

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the findings of my research are:

- 1) The image of immigrants in analysed material, as a result of processes of conceptualisation, consists of five facets: biological, national, legal, economic and martial facets:
 - In the biological aspect immigrants are portrayed as people who look different to the indigenous population, have a different skin colour, Asian facial features;
 - The national facet stresses the difference in nationality or even otherness of immigrants. The

mass media portrays immigrants as ethnically alien;

- The legal facet emphasizes that immigrants are involved in murders, rapes and robberies; they are smugglers, drug dealers, terrorists; they steal and cheat. Immigrants are depicted being accompanied by policemen or the Federal Migration Service;
- As for the economic facet immigrants are portrayed as a threat to the country's economic development;
- In the martial aspect, migrants are depicted as occupants and invaders. They come in huge

- numbers and form units similar to the military;
- 1) Authors of analysed texts use visual discrimination strategies: representation as agents of negatively valued actions, discriminatory stereotyping, collectivization and aggregation;
 - 2) The analysed Russian internet mass media paints a negative picture of immigrants, especially those from Central Asia and the Caucasus.

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