

## ЯЗЫК И КУЛЬТУРА

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### LEXICAL AND SYNTACTIC MEANS OF EXPRESSING EMOTIVITY IN THE FIRST WAVE OF THE PANDEMIC: A MEDIA DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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The article looks at the image of the coronavirus reflected in the language of modern mass media texts, covering social, economic and political spheres, from a linguistic point of view. The aim of the research is to identify the role of lexical and syntactic means in expressing emotions in English-language online articles, video, and radio podcasts that contain information about the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic all over the world. Since the article examines a relatively recent globally significant phenomenon and provides analysis of the latest materials with illustrations of how they function in modern media texts, its relevance is obvious. The author presents a classification of the most common types of emotions expressed in contemporary media texts relative to the coronavirus pandemic. This classification singles out the most frequently observed types of emotions (positive and negative) and traces the link between types of emotion and ways of their expression. For the purposes of the analysis, the emotive lexical and syntactic means are split into several groups. Within each of the groups, there is a division into lexical means (namely stylistically marked lexical items and literary devices) and syntactic means (communicative types of sentences and violations of syntactic structures of sentences). The author identifies the most frequently used items, structures, and devices in oral and written media texts, presenting the results of the research in the form of a table. The results and conclusions of the study may serve as foundation for further research into the role of lexical and syntactic means that help to convey various shades of emotions in mass media texts.

**Key words:** expressive means; syntax; lexis; representation of emotions; COVID-19; mass media.

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**Лексические и синтаксические средства эмотивности в первую волну пандемии:  
дискурс-анализ медиа**

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Статья посвящена изучению языкового образа коронавируса в современных текстах средств массовой информации, которые охватывают социальную, экономическую и политическую

сферы жизни населения планеты, с лингвистической точки зрения. Цель исследования — выявить роль лексических и синтаксических средств в выражении эмоций в англоязычных статьях, видео- и радиоподкастах, содержащих информацию о последствиях коронавирусной инфекции во всем мире. Актуальность данной статьи определяется ее целью и новейшими материалами с наглядными примерами их функционирования в современных медиатекстах. Что касается методологии, в настоящем исследовании первостепенное значение имеют методы лингвистического описания и анализа текста через призму когнитивно-дискурсивного подхода к изучению языка. Данные методы и приемы применяются к текстам статей и подкастов, содержащих эмоциональный компонент, с целью отбора, анализа и систематизации фактического материала в рамках основных задач работы. В рамках настоящей статьи автор предлагает классификацию наиболее распространенных типов эмоций, выраженных в современных медиатекстах в отношении глобальной пандемии коронавируса, разразившейся в 2020 году. В данной классификации выделены наиболее часто встречающиеся типы эмоций (положительные и отрицательные), а также прослежена связь между типом эмоции и способом ее выражения. Для целей анализа в рамках настоящего исследования эмотивные лексические и синтаксические средства разделены на несколько групп. Выделяются лексические средства, охватывающие стилистически маркированные лексические единицы и литературные приемы, и синтаксические средства, включающие коммуникативные типы предложений и нарушения синтаксической структуры предложения. Наиболее часто используемые средства, структуры и приемы придания эмотивности выявлены как в устных, так и в письменных медиатекстах и представлены в виде таблицы. Основные проблемы и вопросы, поднятые в данном исследовании, могут послужить поводом для дальнейшего изучения роли лексических и синтаксических средств, способствующих передаче различных оттенков эмоций в текстах современных СМИ.

**Ключевые слова:** средства экспрессивности; синтаксис; лексикология; репрезентация эмоций; COVID-19; средства массовой информации.

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## 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, which engulfed the world at the beginning of 2020, has become an inseparable part of new reality. Being one of the biggest challenges ever faced by humanity, coronavirus has altered many aspects of life: health, economy, education, communication, and language. There has been a lot of talk in the news and the mass media about the impact of the new disease on the population of the world, and many different authors have continued to express different attitudes towards the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences.

One of the most important problems of modern linguistics is the issue of creating expressiveness by means of various linguistic levels. O. V. Aleksandrova emphasizes that the expressive function of language consists in the ability “to express the emotional state of the speaker or writer, his subjective attitude to the designated objects and phenomena of reality” (Aleksandrova 2009: 7). According to E. M. Beregovskaya, expressiveness should be defined as “an ability

of syntactic forms to increase the pragmatic potential of an utterance beyond the degree that is achieved by lexical meanings of the elements that fill these syntactic forms” (Beregovskaya 2004: 3). As far as pragmatic impact is concerned, its major aim is to evoke an emotional response in a reader’s mind and transfer the author’s actual intentions by means of “an affective message” (Strelnitskaya 2010).

Researching lexical and syntactic features of media texts in terms of emotional content plays an important role in modern linguistics. With the emergence and rapid development of the coronavirus pandemic, its reflection in the language of the media has become one of the central issues of contemporary linguistic studies (Tan et al. 2020; Piller, Zhang, Li 2020; Karachina 2020). The present article is one of the first attempts to analyze the image of COVID-19 through the prism of lexical and syntactic means used by different authors and speakers when they talk about the pandemic. Moreover, effort is made to identify and classify the universal techniques for communicating information regarding the coronavirus infection through the mass media and the linguistic tools for influencing the mass audience.

## **2. Materials and Methodology**

The materials used for the purposes of the present research work relate to the most popular kind of contemporary media texts: the news and analytical articles from highly popular online sources of information (BBC News, The Economist, The Financial Express, Independent, The Diplomat, AP News, Sky News, GMP News, Birmingham Live) and some radio and video podcasts (TED Connects, BBC Radio, ABC News, NBC News, The World News, Microsoft News, ABQ Channel, CNBC Television, NowThis News, Teleradio-Moldova). The corpus of such texts produced and transmitted daily through the media continues to grow steadily.

In terms of methodology, the present research leans on the methods of linguistic description and text analysis through the prism of the cognitive-discursive approach to language studies. These methods and techniques are applied to the texts of articles and podcasts that contain emotional components with the goal of selecting, analyzing, and systematizing the factual material within the parameters of and in accordance to the main objectives of the study.

For the purposes of analysis, emotive lexical and syntactic means were divided into several groups. The author singles out the most frequently observed types of emotions (positive and negative) and traces the link between types of emotions and ways of their expression.

The present paper investigates 20 articles from online magazines and news platforms and channels and 20 radio and video podcasts on different

COVID-related issues, which were featured on British, American, and Australian websites in 2020–2021. The method of continuous sampling was used to collect the material when studying the essence of emotive language and identifying its main functions in digital media discourse.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

One of peculiar features of contemporary mass media texts consists in their “judgmental nature” (Smakhtin, Klimova, Arkhipova, Andrievskii, Shalamova, & Sidorova 2018: 103). Since Eddy M. Zemach defines emotions as attitudes to a particular situation or object, “like judgments” (Zemach 2001), it follows that modern media texts are highly emotive. Authors use different linguistic strategies to convey their emotions which can very often be “conceived of as pragmatic or epistemic actions” (Wilutzky 2015).

There exist many classifications of human emotions in modern science based on different aspects. For example, some researchers sort them out according to the degree of consciousness (Zajonc 1994). An American psychologist Carroll E. Izard in his differential emotions theory emphasizes ten distinct emotions, which are: joy, excitement, anguish, rage, startle, revulsion, scorn, humiliation, remorse, and terror (Izard 1994). All other emotional states, according to Izard, are derivatives or composites, i.e. they arise on the basis of several fundamentals. One of the world’s leading experts in the field of emotional psychology P. Ekman offers a list of six universal types of emotions: happiness, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, and surprise (Ekman 1999).

For the purposes of data analysis, we suggest a classification of the most common types of emotions expressed in contemporary media texts relative to the coronavirus pandemic. It seems obvious that the global outbreak of coronavirus and its dire consequences tend not to evoke such positive emotions as happiness. However, shared and joint opposition to the new dangerous disease can give rise to some positive shades of emotions: optimism (a very broad emotion expressing the belief that everything will be fine whatever the circumstances), hope (a more specific emotion or state of mind, based on an expectation of positive outcomes with respect to events and circumstances in one’s life or the world at large), and confidence (a state of being convinced that a chosen course of action is the best). As for negative emotions, we expand Ekman’s classification by clarifying and adding various shades of emotions, both reflected in the lexical and syntactic content in the articles and expressed by means of intonation in the reports and interviews devoted to the COVID-19 catastrophe. According to the analyzed written and oral texts, it seems that the most frequently expressed emotions are as follows:

**Table 1.** The most frequent emotions linguistically expressed in the media texts on COVID-19

Positive Emotions			Negative Emotions		
Emotion	Number of Texts		Emotion	Number of Texts	
	Oral	Written		Oral	Written
Optimism	0	3	Regret	3	1
Hope	3	2	Anxiety	2	3
Confidence	0	1	Confusion	5	4
			Excitement	2	1
			Despair	4	2
			Anger	1	3

This article presents two major ways of expressing attitudes to the COVID-19 pandemic through mass media texts.

### 3.1. Lexical Means

It is a proven fact that each language offers a wide range of various means that help authors to express and transfer their emotions. Many researchers support the idea that lexical means play a key role among the emotive tools of the language (Babenko 1989; Tripolskaya 1999; Brandausova 2008; Krasavsky 2008; Mikheeva 2010; Ebzeeva, Lenko 2016; Kabanova 2017; Egorova 2018; Loginova 2022). The lexical system of the language includes two types of words that convey human emotions and attitudes to different actions or phenomena: names of certain emotions (Gak 1998) and emotive lexical items (Shakhovsky 2019). It should also be noted that emotive lexis is traditionally studied taking into account such categories as evaluation, expressiveness, and imagery.

One of the most explicit ways of expressing emotions in texts is the use of interjections. This kind of expressing emotional states or attitudes towards something is mainly characteristic of oral texts:

(1) *When you're in quarantine, and there's really nothing to do but eat — oh my God — that was brutal!* (The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon; actor Jim Parsons about how he spent time in quarantine 2020)

The interjection 'oh my God' is used to highlight a strong feeling of despair in the midst of illness, verbally expressed through the adjective 'brutal' along with the intonation (a strong emphasis on the interjection, more specifically, the word "God") and the facial expression of the actor (tight lips and a downward gaze).

(2) *Oh, I don't know. I just feel like people think just because we're like a healthcare worker, that we are somehow immune to this, and we're not* (NowThis News; Nurse Shares Heartbreaking Reality of Health Care Workers Fighting COVID-19 2020).

Here the interjection reflects the nurse's deep emotion of despair due to insecurity in the face of a terrible disease that takes lives of her patients and colleagues day after day. She cries a lot when talking about her work in the hospital.

(3) *Just now the world is rightly focused on approving, making and administering vaccines. **Alas**, it also needs to face up to the fact that before jabs come to the rescue, the new variants will spread, creating deep difficulties for policymakers* (The Economist 2021).

In this excerpt, the interjection 'alas' expresses the author's strong emotion of regret about the fact that, despite numerous diligent attempts of scientists all over the world to create an effective vaccine against the coronavirus and recent successes in this matter, the virus may soon mutate, making all the work on the issue almost pointless.

Another important lexical means which helps to express emotions in texts is phraseological units. Phraseological units can often be found in both oral and written texts:

(4) *Many people crowded together in large metropolises meaning that disease can **spread like wildfire*** (BBC Radio 2020).

The author uses the idiom 'to spread like wildfire' (= extremely quickly) to show anxiety in India's population due to the recent outbreak of COVID-19; people are scared since they do not have a clear idea of how quickly the virus will spread.

The title of the article "*Coronavirus researchers warn of two '**dark horse**' early signs of Covid-19*" (Birmingham Live 2020) directly points to the feeling of anxiety and confusion in the face of the new dangerous virus.

Among the stylistic means of the lexical level, we should note the widespread use of simile (which is regarded as a truncated phraseological unit) as one of the main means of figurative description of reality. For example, in an interview, Dr. Michael Osterholm compares the COVID-19 pandemic with a "forest fire":

(5) *I'm actually of the mind right now, I think this is more **like a forest fire**. I don't think that this is going to slow down...* (Microsoft News 2020)

One more significant means of transferring emotional message is a conceptual metaphor. According to G. Lakoff, "metaphor is not a matter of language but of thought: metaphor is 'a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system'" (Lakoff 1993: 203). As a conceptual mechanism, a metaphor provides mutual projection of various mental formations within a certain conceptual structure. Traditionally three major types of conceptual projections are singled out: 1) single-feature mappings; 2) systematic mappings; and 3) image-schematic mappings (Koller 2003: 27–28). It is essential to notice that projec-

tions preserve the topology of the source field to the extent that it is consistent with the internal structure of the “target sphere” (Lakoff 1993). The mechanism of production of figurative expressions by means of language as well as their comprehension implicates metaphorical correspondences, which are an integral part of the conceptual system, i.e. they are the roots of it as a result of reliance on the realized physical, cultural, and social experience (Lakoff, Johnson 1980). Metaphorical model “fight against the COVID-19 pandemic is war” is widely used within the contemporary media discourse. The frequent use of this metaphor can be explained by similarity of the nature of military actions with the struggle of mankind against the coronavirus. The virus is conceived as a dangerous enemy which humanity is combatting while suffering heavy losses on the invisible front:

(6) *“The **fight** against the COVID-19 virus is **like a war** from which we must emerge victorious!” — this is how the last six months of their lives are described by several medical workers from the Republic of Moldova, who defend the borders of public health (Teleradio-Moldova 2020).*

Doctors fighting for the lives of patients perceive their work as a fierce battle against a powerful and very dangerous enemy. But it should be noted that their attitude towards this situation is quite optimistic, as evidenced by the epithet ‘victorious’ and the exclamation mark in the end.

(7) *It is interesting to notice that not only doctors, but also economists compare the new virus to war. The title of the article on the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic says: “Coronavirus crisis: For survival, fight Covid-19 pandemic **like a war**” (The Financial Express 2020).*

The article “Vietnam’s War Against COVID-19” clearly shows the public attitude to the virus:

(8) *Whether it’s a public official vowing to “Beat the pandemic **like beating invaders**,” or a daily newscaster announcing that “We will **prevail over the virus, as we’ve prevailed over many previous enemies**,” the nation approached COVID-19 as if it were a military adversary (The Diplomat 2020).*

The new virus is perceived as an enemy, and people in their determination strongly believe that together they will be able to defeat it. The simile “beat the pandemic like beating invaders, prevail over the virus, as we’ve prevailed over many previous enemies,” based on the metaphorical frame “The Covid-19 pandemic is a war,” helps to convey a strong feeling of confidence.

Many political leaders and journalists in the news media adapt “war metaphors” to describe health-related, social, and economic challenges the world is facing (Isaacs, Priesz 2020; Semino 2021). In this connection, it is interesting to mention that some contemporary scholars believe that the use of such metaphors might be dangerous since people can be drawn to “an inward-looking, my-

country-first attitude” (Muzu 2020). The optimal solution may consist in the use of some less radical similes and metaphors in the mass media. For instance, Prime Minister Boris Johnson acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic “...has been a “**disaster**” for Britain, as he announced a spending splurge designed to get the country — and his faltering Conservative government — back on track.; “This has been a **disaster**,” Johnson acknowledged Monday. “Let’s not mince our words. I mean, this has been **an absolute nightmare** for the country and the country’s gone through a profound shock” (AP News 2020).

In one of the recent interviews, Prince Harry mentioned that the current COVID-19 pandemic should be perceived as the severe punishment from nature: “**Mother Nature sends us to our rooms for bad behaviour** to think about what we’ve done” (Sky News Australia 2020).

The conceptual analogy “nature as a strict mother” expresses Prince Harry’s deep regret for the current situation and makes people think about the adverse and destructive consequences of their activities.

Another notable feature of the media language during the pandemic in terms of lexis is the emergence of a large number of neologisms: new lexical units or new meanings that appear in a certain period of language development within the community (Herberg 2001). Many modern linguists (Zabotkina 1989; Lin 2013; Lin, Konchakova 2015; Girčienė 2015; Kuznetsova, Bezuglova 2017; Kobenko, Riabova, Snisar 2018) suggest that one of the reasons for the emergence of neologisms is the need for a speaker or writer to convey their thoughts in a more meaningful and emotional way.

In the difficult period of the COVID-19 pandemic, neologisms that reflect emotions regarding the current situation are coined quicker than ever and commonly used in the mass media. For example, the title of the article “*Trump dubbed ‘Covidiot in-chief’ after telling Americans not to be afraid of coronavirus*” (Independent 2020) clearly demonstrates the attitude of Democrats towards Donald Trump after he encouraged his fellow citizens not to be afraid of the coronavirus even though it had already claimed many lives. In this case, we deal with play on words: a part of a compound noun “in-chief” is added when referring to the head specialist in a particular sphere (e. g., *editor-in-chief*). And here that part merges with the neologism “covidiot”: “a person who annoys other people by refusing to obey the social distancing rules designed to prevent the spread of COVID-19” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary) which explicitly reflects sarcasm, extreme disrespect, and anger.

### 3.2. Syntactic Means

To express emotions in texts, a variety of structural, semantic, and intonational features of syntactic units can be used, as well as some features of compositional construction of the text including its division into paragraphs and punc-



tuation marks (Aleksandrova 2009). Studying the expressive potential of syntactic means remains one of the topical areas of modern linguistics, and basic characteristics of expressive syntax have been thoroughly studied by a number of well-known linguists including O. V. Aleksandrova, I. V. Arnold, O. A. Kostrova, E. M. Beregovskaya, G. N. Akimova, and others.

In order to identify the main mechanisms of expressiveness and emotivity in a sentence, we will consider its relevant structural and semantic features as well as the basic functions of communicative types of sentences, traditionally distinguished in modern syntax:

1) exclamatory sentences, where one of the most important means of imparting expressiveness is exclamatory intonation, which conveys a wide range of emotions:

(9) *ABQ Fight COVID-19: We're all in this together!* (ABQ Channel 2020) — this title of the article bears a call to unite in a difficult time of the pandemic and expresses a hope that together people can defeat the insidious virus.

(10) *The virus will not have a chance against us!* (CNBC Television 2020) — this statement, made at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic by Donald Trump, sounds optimistic: the president instills confidence in people and assures them that the virus will not prevail over a united nation.

2) imperative sentences which express the categorical meaning of motivation, which is often associated with expression and functions as a means of influencing attitude and behavior:

(11) *In times of COVID-19, don't give up on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and stay united to preserve antimicrobials!* (GMP News 2021)

3) interrogative sentences, among which rhetorical questions bear the greatest emotional coloring:

(12) *What is the worst nightmare that a public health official could have and what are the things that we fear the most? The answer is consistent among me and my colleagues: the emergence of a respiratory illness that is highly transmissible its efficiency of going from person to person that has a significant degree of morbidity and mortality* (NBC News 2020).

Here the rhetorical question 'What is the worst nightmare that a public health official could have and what are the things that we fear the most?', implying the answer 'The new coronavirus infection,' conveys awareness of the COVID-19's dangerous outcomes along with the feeling of confusion in the current unfavorable situation.

In addition to structural and semantic features of specific communicative types of sentences per se, at the syntactic level of the media texts, expressiveness also occurs as a result of violations of the syntactic structure:

(13) *More fundamental than whether other countries are willing to see China supplant America is whether it intends to* (The Economist 2020).

In this example, inversion in the indirect question is used to express the author's excitement about China's intentions towards America during a difficult time of the pandemic.

(14) *Indeed, in some instances the pandemic has introduced inefficiencies—the third factor. Companies are still spending on extra cleaning and other measures to make people feel safer, which will do little to raise ity* (The Economist 2022).

Here the parenthetical insertion belonging to the category of deliberation demonstrates the author's assurance of the fact that the consequences of the pandemic have a negative impact on companies' profits.

(15) *I think this is an unprecedented, really disconcerting time for everyone, with things being shut down, not knowing exactly how long it's going to last, worrying about the health of all the people we care about* (TED Connects 2020).

In the analyzed excerpt, homogeneous parts of the sentence, as both a syntactic and a lexical means, help the passionate techie Bill Gates to express the emotion of despair and anxiety when facing the dangerous virus. The participles 'unprecedented,' 'disconcerting,' and 'shut down' are attributes, whereas 'not knowing...' and 'worrying...' act as predicative constructions in the sentence.

(16) *The amount of patients that are coming in the emergency department and then to the hospital being admitted are tremendously higher. Then let's take it a step further: the number of patients that are requiring full support and eventually being intubated is three-four times what we were seeing before. // Much worse* (NBC News 2020).

This passage was taken from the video podcast on the popular media platform "NBC News". The speaker uses parcellation to highlight the feeling of anxiety and hopelessness in the face of the mutated variant of the coronavirus.

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, the present research demonstrates active use of emotive lexical means and syntactic constructions in the English oral and written mass media texts related to coronavirus, and the palette of their expressive potential is fairly diverse. Various shades of emotions expressed by these means may be divided into two big groups:

1) negative emotions (despair, confusion, regret, anxiety, excitement, and anger) in 77.5 % of the texts analyzed;

2) positive emotions (a sense of optimism, hope, and confidence) in 22.5 % of the texts analyzed.

Within each one of these two groups there is a division into lexical means, which include stylistically marked lexical items and literary devices, and syntactic means, which involve communicative types of sentences and violations of syntactic structure. The most frequently used items, structures, and devices that occur in both oral and written media texts can be presented in a form of a table:

**Table 2.** The most frequently used lexical and syntactic means of conveying emotions in media texts on COVID-19 at the level of minor syntax

Positive Emotions				Negative Emotions			
Lexical Means		Syntactic Means		Lexical Means		Syntactic Means	
Stylistically marked lexical items	Literary devices	Communicative types of sentences	Violations of syntactic structure	Stylistically marked lexical items	Literary devices	Communicative types of sentences	Violations of syntactic structure
neologisms	epithets	exclamatory sentences,	parenthetical insertions	phraseological units	metaphors	rhetorical questions	inversion
	metaphors	imperative sentences		neologisms	epithets		parenthetical insertions
	similes			interjections	similes		homogeneous parts of the sentence
							parcelation

The analysis of the sources proves that both lexical content and syntactic structures of statements play an important role in helping authors and speakers to highlight the main ideas in their utterances and to express different types of emotions regarding the current situation in the pandemic-stricken world.

The results and conclusions of the present study may be used as a springboard for further research into the role of lexical and syntactic means that help to convey different shades of emotions in mass media texts. It might also be interesting to analyze emotive components of media texts not only at the level of minor syntax, but also at the level of major syntax that involves composition features.

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