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## THE IMAGE-CONCEPT OF RUSSIA IN THE BRITISH MASS MEDIA TEXTS (2017-2019)<sup>1</sup>

**KEYWORDS:** linguistic imagology, linguistic conceptology, British media discourse, image-concept of state 'Russia'; nominative field of the concept, structure of the concept, nominative, metaphorical, value, associative components of the concept

**ABSTRACT:** The subject of this article are the linguistic means used to form the image-concept "Russia". Corpus content analysis on the wide range material of the British print and electronic press for 2017-2019 is the base for constructing the nominative field with the core and near, far and final peripheries of image "Russia". The conceptual analysis revealed verbal means used for expansion of the concept volume and its component layers- metaphorical, nominative, evaluative and associative. These devices create the negative image-concept of state Russia in British public consciousness.

### 1. Introduction

The jubilee year since the end of the Second World War is a good reason to look at the 75 years global confrontation of different degrees of tension from a linguistic point of view. The information and cognitive wars waged by the states between each other have revealed the important role of language in the sphere of influence on the public consciousness of both its own people and the peoples of other states. The image of another state, forming in the minds of any nation, is the subject of a study of linguistic imagology, which studies the possibilities and devices of the influence of language as a means of ideological and political struggle.

Within the framework of imagology, the scientists try "to find reasons and a scientific explanation for creating negative images and stereotypes about other peoples and countries" (Zemskov 2011, 2). K. E. Boulding (1959, 7) underlined that the people whose decisions determine the policies and actions of nations do not respond to the "objective" facts of the situation, whatever that may mean, but to their "image" of the situation". Therefore, it is necessary to remember the importance of "the impact of national images on the relations among states, that is, on the course of events in international relations".

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Another science, linguoconceptology, within its paradigm considers the “image” to be “the primary stage in the formation of a concept, its concrete sensory content, and then a coding tool, a sign of a more and more complicated multidimensional concept as it becomes more intelligible” (Boldyrev 2019, 50). The volume of the concept is constantly increasing due to the acquisition of new features, like a snowball, which is constantly being enveloped in new layers (ibidem, 30). The deep interconnection and mutual influence of the image and the concept, as mental entities, will help, from our point of view, to reveal the principles of formation of the image – concept of “Russia” in the concept sphere of British public consciousness and the set of linguistic means that the British media use in this process.

## 2. Literary review

The scientific literature on the “Concept” and “Image” is vast and inexhaustible. But the integrative approach to these two phenomena is not yet in the focus of research by the broad masses of linguistic scientists, although we have discovered scientific works that we can rely on in our article and use in achieving our goal and solving our scientific problems.

First of all, it is worth noting that at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries the notion of “concept” firmly entered the Russian science of language and partly replaced the “image” in the sense in which A. A. Potebnya understood it. Currently, the notion of “concept” reflects all representations: scientific, and non-scientific, and pre-scientific, existing in the minds of native speakers of an object of reality (Serebrennikov/Kubryakova 1988, 3). Linguists have not yet come to a unified definition of this phenomenon, but the majority agreed that it is a mental unit, a quantum of knowledge, a culturally marked verbalized meaning. Due to the unclear distinction between the “concept” and the “image” in many works devoted to the study of concepts, there is a divergence in the use of these terms. In some works, they are used as identical, synonymous ones. Nevertheless, in the process of studying the concept as a linguistic, psychological, social phenomenon, scientists were convinced that the image and the concept are different terms, although hierarchically correlated. L. B. Nikitina substantiated the use of the complex term “image-concept” from the point of view of anthropocentric semantics, proposing to use the term “image” only when a separate fragment of the world is displayed in the language. For example, the image of man, nature, etc. However, in the transition from the reflective capabilities of the language to the global mentality system, this term is clearly not enough. “Whenever we talk about the linguistic image of an object or phenomenon of reality, we mean the linguistic embodiment of the semantic universal (mental essence) – concept. The notion of “concept” incorporates the concept of “language image” (Nikitina 2011, 98). The three components

of the image: subjective-sensual, nominative, and emotional-evaluative (reflection, comprehension, and evaluation) coincide with the main components of the concept (metaphorical, nominative, evaluative) in accordance with the definition of V. I. Karasik (2002, 12). The image and the concept convey the same deep meaning, and the way of representing this meaning is different: the image is continuous, undivided, and the concept is discrete, analytical (Tarasova 2018). Considering that the object of our study is “the image-concept of another state”, we took into account the opinion of S. E. Khalitova (2010, 134), who correlated the notion of “concept” with the imagological concept of “image” on the basis of their common view on the subject of research “from the outside”, from the standpoint of national culture. I. V. Borisenko (2008, 26) expressed the opinion that the imagological image as a fact of national identification can be correlated with the concept, “clot” of culture, as “private” with “general”, as sensual, emotional and axiological with a more nominative, logical, cognitive”. From the point of view of E. V. Lobkova (2005, 45-46), the “image-concept” as a single integrative mental phenomenon includes objective, rational components that are the result of a person’s knowledge of his external and internal world, and subjective (metaphorical, associative, evaluative, emotional) meanings that reflect the peculiarities of a person’s interpretation of cognizable things and phenomena”.

Summarizing the opinions of linguists, we will try to formulate our own definition of the “image-concept of a state”, which we will use in our work analyzing its formation in the nominative sphere of British society by the British mass media. Therefore, an image-concept of a state is a twofold mental verbalizable formation that includes a linguistic foreign national image, as a result of the initial reflection of another state and related subjective meanings (metaphorical, nominative, evaluative, associative), reflecting perceptual characteristics or persuasive interpretations of another state.

An important role in shaping the image of a “different” country in the human mind is played by past experience, value orientations, established principles, rules, as well as stereotypical representations and myths. Concepts can change their meaning, significance and importance in different periods of the history and development of society. They add new features that increase the nominative field of the concept, which is understood as “the totality of the language means objectifying the concept in a certain period of development of society” (Popova 2007, 66). The nominative field of the concept consists of a nuclear, which contains direct nominations of the concept itself, and different levels of the periphery, which include various language means of expressing the concept, revealing the content of the concept and its relation to it in different communicative situations.

### 3. Data and methodology

The purpose of this article is a linguistic analysis of the ways of forming the image-concept of “Russia” in the modern British media discourse. The study was conducted on the wide range material of the British print and electronic press for 2017-2019: The Guardian (48), The Times (28), The Daily Telegraph (27), The Financial Times (21), The Independent (12), The Daily Mail (4), The Daily Star (1), The Conversation (1), The National Interest (1), The Sun (1), The Standpoint (1), The New European (1), The Week (1); journals: The Express (3), The Economist (7), The Spectator (6), The New Statesman (6), Prospect magazine (3), Opendemocracy (4), Calvertjournal (1); сайты [bbc.com](#) (3), [gov.uk](#) (3), [wired.com](#) (1), [intellinews.com](#) (1), [aeon.com](#)(1), [news.sky.com](#) (1) and British analytical centre Chatham House (1). In these publications, 193 articles on Russia were identified and analyzed.

In our study, we applied several scientific methods, including corpus content analysis based on the AntConc program developed by Dr. Anthony Lawrence. The corpus approach gave us the opportunity to carry out a quantitative analysis of all the linguistic means used in the indicated media material and organize them according to the field principle: from the nuclear to the near, far and final periphery. The method of field structuring helped to identify the mechanism for the formation of a foreign image-concept of another state and quantitatively to prove the significance of certain aspects in the image-concept “Russia” formed by the British media. Using conceptual analysis of the aggregate of linguistic means of expression, we determined the content and structure of the image-concept of Russia, which includes the nominative, evaluative, metaphorical and associative components, confirming the paradigm that not a word expresses a concept, but a concept is expressed by many words and idioms.

### 4. Results

In the process of content analysis of 193 articles of modern British media discourse, we assembled a corpus of linguistic means with a total volume of 181 813 words from all parts of speech, including prepositions and conjunctions. The results of our quantitative calculations do not include lexemes that occur less than 4 times in the available language material. That indicator immediately testifies to the belonging of these words to the final periphery of the nominative field of the image-concept “Russia”, although it is possible they had a brighter and more emotional character. If we take into account the definition of the nuclear of the concept as “a certain strong point of consciousness” around which associative vectors are grouped (Karasik/Slyshkin 2001, 77), then 1552 word usage of the representative lexeme “Russia” testify to its explicit belonging to the core of the image-concept. We placed ‘Russian’ (958)

and ‘Russians’ (146) tokens in the nuclear zone, as well as some substitutes of the key-lexeme as ‘Moscow’ (425), ‘Kremlin’ (247), ‘bear’ (26), ‘Russian State’ (25), ‘Russian Federation’ (11), ‘Putin’s Russia’ (5), ‘Mother Russia’ (5), which together comprise 1848 occurrences and form the nominative component of the image – concept of “Russia”.

The usage of this nomination as ‘Moscow’ and ‘Kremlin’ is customary practice in press to make it clear where Russian (or politics of other countries) is concentrated. For example: Washington, Paris, Brussels, as the city where the European government meets, the White House as the place where the US president is located.

- (1) It’s a battle for hearts and minds – and it’s part of a wider propaganda war between Moscow and the West unfolding on the continent (Telegraph, 2019, September 14).
- (2) But increasingly, Kremlin tactics work... (Times, 2019, September 23).

The nomination “Putin’s Russia” identifies Russia with Putin since the events of 2014. It indicates some kind of close connection between the head of state and the country he leads.

- (3) An atmosphere of hate infects society: reporting on the environment in Putin’s Russia (un-earthed.greenpeace.org, 2017, October 27).
- (4) How dangerous is Vladimir Putin’s Russia? (Financial Times, 2018, March 19).

It is worth noting that the “dictator” token appears 15 times in the texts, ruler -11, thus confirming the degree of certain attitude towards the leader of our state.

In some articles, the authors replace the official name of our state with the traditional symbol – a bear.

- (5) A century on, Finland has learnt to tame the Russian bear 100 years after independence, Helsinki sees neighbour as both a threat and opportunity (Financial Times, 2017, December 6).

As it is known, for the formation of certain associations, the creators of texts deliberately regularly use the name of one concept in micro contexts together with the names of other specific concepts. For example, the names of the state and lexemes belonging to certain semantic fields, such fields as “aggression”, “friendliness”, “poverty”, etc. As a result of this use, the name of the state begins to cause associations with the corresponding concepts. The semantics of these associations helps to form either a positive or a negative attitude towards the state (Boeva-Omelechko/Posternyak 2015).

During a comparative-quantitative analysis of the frequency of the use of lexemes of various kinds, we were able to identify three groups of lexemes, unequal in their quantitative composition and estimated connotations, characterizing

the image-concept “Russia”. The first, largest group consists of words relate to the themes of war, weapons, threats, murder, fear, spy mania, “annexation”, and sanctions and had an evident negative connotation.

The biggest block of this group, “War and Armament” concludes 57 tokens that were found in the text 1986 times. For example: war/wars (370), military (217), nuclear(102), defense (100), attack (90), army (89), forces (86), threat (86), threats (29), weapons (66), weapon (21), troops (56), missile (38), armed (44), soldiers (42), missiles (32), enemy (37), enemies (23) bomb/bomber/bombers/bombs/bombing (53), attacks (27), shot (26), battle (23), warfare (23), etc.

The block “Fear, threats, killings, destructive events” consists of 30 tokens that was used 338 times. For example, kill/killer/killing (45), deaths/death (33), fear (32), dangerous (24), died (24), murder (21), aggressive (21), crucial (16), assassination (15), terrorism (12) etc. The words of these two blocks were frequently correlate with the events in Syria and involvement of Russia in the conflict there.

The block “Espionage” amounted to 18 tokens, used 839 times: security (140), intelligence (119), defense (100), KGB (67), investigation (53), spy (40), FSB (35), FBI (29), conspiracy (25), GRU (17), spies (13), espionage (11), smersh (12). Considering the resonance in the British press about the events related to the poisoning of the Skripals and Litvinenko, it is not surprising that the number of uses of lexemes on this subject was high: Salisbury (70), Skripal (36), poisoning (32), Novichok (27), Litvinenko (13).

The British press continues to worry about events in the Ukraine. This block ‘Crimea and Ukraine’ includes lexemes (23) related to problems in the South-East of Ukraine and the return of Crimea to Russia, as well as sanctions against Russia related to them: Ukraine (256), Ukrainian (78), Crimea/Crimean (113), sanctions (91), separatist/separatists (30), interference (29), intervention (29), meddling (25), Donbas (21),confrontation (21), invasion (19), aggression (18), separatist/separatists (30), Donetsk (15), Luhansk (13), isolation (15), peninsula (14), ceasefire (11), escalate (10), expansion (10). Total word usage on this block is 821.

The issues of democracy and internal policy, the confrontation between the authorities and internal opposition in Russia are always in the focus of close attention from British journalists. This block of the first group includes 17 words and 665 word usage: democracy/democratic/democracies/democrats (115), regime (60), opposition (65), crisis (59), protests, protesters (77), violence(52), Navalny (50), liberal(46), ideology(17), Gudkov (11), propaganda (42), arrested/arrests/arrest (55), nationalist/nationalism (36), patriotic/patriotism (24), parade (19), riot (15), pussy (8), repression (14), racism (14), crackdown (12), persuade (6), prison (6), accusation (5).

Thus the tokens of the first group consisted of 128 tokens with negative connotation are used 4649 times in total. Therefore, we put this group of words in the *near periphery* of the nominative field of the “Russia” concept.

The second group of tokens is distinguished by the fact that they can have both positive and negative connotations. This group includes words that reflect the history of Russia and its sporting life (41). The block 'History' includes many historical terms and names, the total number of which is 32 words, which were used 1286 times. Quite a lot of attention in the press of Great Britain in the last period is given to the history of our country, which remembered ambiguously.

Analysts often mention former political leaders of Russia or the Soviet Union. Moreover, based on the number of usage, we can estimate what Soviet leader leave more trace in minds of the British: Stalin (61), Gorbachev (53), Yeltsin (44), Lenin (34), Brezhnev (20), Khrushchev (18).

Journalists recalled the tsarist times: tsar/tsarist (38), empire, imperial (45), monarchy (11) and times of revolution: Bolshevik/Bolsheviks (28), revolution (62), revolutionary (11), communism (16), communist (27), capitalism (10); as well as the times of the Soviet Union: soviet (300), former (159), union (119), perestroika (8), glasnost (5), USSR (37).

Sport is reflected in media in two ways. On the one hand, the doping problems of Russian sports and the World Cup in Russia are condemned, and on the other, football games and Russian football players are discussed. On the topic "Sport" we found 9 tokens with a common usage of 206: football (68), Anikeyev (23), athletes (21), Spartak (21), sport (21), WADA (17), doping (16), Olympics (12), Malofeyev (12).

The 41 tokens of the second group have been used 1492 times. Accordingly, this group was placed in the zone of *the far periphery*.

The third group of tokens includes words related to issues of culture, science, education and positive events in public and international life, because they occupy a very small amount of our sample compared to the above group. It should be noted that these sections mainly reflect positive information about Russia and are not connected by negative events. The theme "Culture and Science" is reflected in 15 tokens with common usage 221: culture/cultural (71), art (21), Shchukin (18), scientists/sciences (29), education (17), comedy (13), scene (11), actors (10), architecture (10), artist (6), Lungin (6), artistic (5).

We also selected lexemes reflecting positive phenomena and events in the public life of Russia and its position in the world. We found 16 words with their usage in the number of 495: good (75), better (62), independent (49), friends (41), human (38), talk (37), diplomatic (34), efforts (34), summit (29), independence (24), trust (24), agreement (23), justice (19), agreements (18), dialogue (17), disarmament (5).

The third group includes 31 tokens with a positive connotation, and they were used in the analyzed articles a total of 716 times and we placed this group in the zone of *the final periphery*

To sum up the results of the concept 'Russia' nominative field forming, we can see the initial image of Russia that may be reflected in the public mind the British society while reading the press of that country. This first image has more negative

features then positive ones, because *the near periphery* is occupied by blocks of words relate to war, death, threats, murder, fear, spy mania.

Such an evaluated component, revealed during the quantitative analysis of the corpus of linguistic means, can be confirmed with the help of concrete examples in articles where the image-concept «Russia» is represented by utterances including epithets with negative connotations.

- (6) It has taken only 80 days for the sad truth to become apparent to the new president and much of his team: however much they might hope for better relations, Russia under Putin is not a reliable partner (Times, 2019, September 23).

We know the peculiarities of the British press, which usually avoids excessive emotionality and harsh assessments, but can use neutral lexicon to give it a positive or (more often) negative assessment. But the repeated mention within one or even several texts of the fact that Russia is a large state, the usage of such neutral-evaluative adjectives as “big”, “vast” opposed to “tiny” states creates a sense of threat emanating from Russia. Moreover, the reader begins stably to associate Russia with aggression, although nobody explicitly says about it.

- (7) Russia’s land may be vast but its economy is only the size of South Korea’s (FT, 2019, April 28).

However, recently, it was noticed that such a neutral position of the British press began to move towards a more open expression of feelings and emotions. Analysts can openly warn that when dealing with Russia, one must remember its rich resources that it can spend on potentially offensive weapons.

- (8) [...] doing an economic deal with Russia that is going to mean Russia is *richer* and more able to spend money on weapons that could potentially be used in an *offensive* way (New Statement, 2019, May 17).

The Guardian analyst saw in the fact of hosting the World Cup in Russia only a symbol and a flashy, fake demonstration of Russia’s “greatness” for the world and for domestic consumption, but not a reason for peace and cooperation and an indicator of achievements in the country’s development.

- (9) The World Cup would also carry symbolic value. I think the original idea was a demonstration of *Russia’s greatness* for both the outside world and a domestic audience (Guardian, 2018, April 8).



Moreover, even recognizing the positive moments of openness that the guests of the World Cup saw in Russia the authors warn that these ‘intoxicating sensations’ will soon end.

- (10) For all the refreshing openness of this World Cup, and the *intoxicating sensation* of a night-time walk down Nikolskaya Street, there is good reason to remain wary of what comes next (Telegraph, 2018, June 23).

In the structure of the image-concept of “Russia”, the figurative-metaphorical component played an important role. It becomes visible during the conceptual analysis of texts and the identification of various types of metaphors. *The anthropomorphic type of metaphors* correlates with the nominative side of the concept, because it give the concept a name of another category of objects. For example, the English media discourse sometimes uses the metaphor “Mother Russia” to create ironic implication.

- (11) The Russians are using the fear of Islamism as an excuse to crack down on all religious activity that refuses to bow the knee to *Mother Russia* (Guardian, 2017, March 9).

A journalist from the online magazine [standpointmag.co.uk](http://standpointmag.co.uk), analyzing Putin’s statement about the preservation of traditional family values in Russia, asserted perhaps with a great deal of English irony.

- (12) Russia has become the only *defender of Christian values* ([standpointmag.co.uk](http://standpointmag.co.uk), 2017, June 29).

An objective look at Russian investments in the British economy allowed the Guardian newspaper to recognize that their country has some kind of benefit from Russian residents in Britain. They have also the memory of the fact that during the Second World War Russia and Britain were allies.

- (13) ‘The UK, for its part, has benefited from Russian investments and from the contribution to its society made by many resident Russians. British and Russians *fought shoulder to shoulder* in the two great wars of the last century’ (The Guardian, 2018, April 17).

In consequence of this, the author has to admit:

- (14) Like it or not, Russia and the UK *need each other* – and will have to talk (Guardian, 2018, April 17).

*Theatrical metaphors* are widely used by British journalists and publicists. Russia is represented not only as one of the leading actors but as an extremely important actor on the world stage that conducts military operations hiding behind politics:

- (15) Over the past several years, the international community has witnessed the return of Russia as an important global actor (standpointmag.co.uk, February 20, 2019).
- (16) Russia is trolling us. This is warfare disguised as political theatre (Guardian, 2018, September 15).

Moreover, Ukraine and Syria are represented as theatrical hobbies of Russia:

- (17) We are all familiar with its (Russia's) principal theatres of involvement – Ukraine and Syria (www.gov.uk, 2017, February 2).

The same applies to *game metaphors*. In connection with the events in Syria, Russia is considered as card player.

- (18) *Russia's military gamble* in Syria is paying off handsomely (Economist, 2019, May 16).

*Game metaphors* associated with different types of games are quite common: military, computer and card ones. Namely, British journalists claim that

- (19) Putin's war of words with the West escalated into war games (express.co.uk, 2018, March 31).

An important role in creating the image of Russia in the British media discourse belongs to *zoomorphic metaphors*. An image of bear represented Russia in Western European cultures since the period of XVI-XVIII centuries,

- (20) How the west underestimated the *Russian economic bear* (Independent, 2019, June 17).

In 2018, in the British political mass media discourse a new zoomorphic metaphor is appeared, comparing Russia with unpredictable and dangerous gorilla.

- (21) The former British ambassador to Moscow Sir Roderic Lyne counselled against further tit-for-tat diplomatic measures, saying: 'It is not sensible to mud-wrestle with a *gorilla*' (Guardian, 2018, March 17).

The list of types of metaphors of the British media not long ago was replenished by a new type *artifact metaphor*: Russia – a house.

- (22) Russia is the *house that Vladimir Putin built* – and he'll never abandon it (FT, 2017, March 27).

A metaphor comparing Russia with a creaky ship and its creak with traditional Russian propaganda, which is not worth to believe is close to the British, as representatives of a maritime power.

- (23) Vladimir Putin's Russia is *a creaking ship*. Don't fall for the propaganda (Guardian, 2018, 25 July).

Associative component of the concept 'Russia' is sometimes represented with utterances containing words 'center (4), superpower (4), empire (22)'. According to British journalist of 'The Economist', Russia has become a center of diplomacy:

- (24) Moscow has turned into a center for Middle Eastern diplomacy (Economist, 2019, May 16).

The columnist of 'the Economist' newspaper admitted that currently Russia is the only Christian country which national church has an increasing influence on its armed forces.

- (25) Yet there is one historically *Christian land* where, albeit after a 70-year communist interlude, the national church enjoys huge, growing and largely uncontested influence over the armed forces. *That country is Russia* (Economist, 2019, May 29).

Unfortunately, the positive features and events of Russia are rarely reflected in British media discourse. It takes up a small amount of information field of Great Britain and do not contribute much to creating the positive image of Russia. In most cases, British journalists remain true to themselves and their stereotypes, although they criticize Russia for this.

- (26) Russia is a nation in decline, stuck with a Cold War KGB mindset – the West must treat it as such (Telegraph, 2017, April 10).  
(27) It is important to see Russia for what it is: a country with deep social and economic problems and in long term decline (Telegraph, 2017, April 10).  
(28) Russia is a nuisance to its neighbours, but lacks the cash and the clout to be a global superpower (The Times, 2019, September 23).

## 5. Conclusion

Thus, the combined linguistic analysis of UK media resources for 2017-2019 allows us to expose and to track the formation device of the image-concept "Russia" on the way of nominative field constructing and adding layers of nominative, metaphorical, value and associative components. With the help of these linguistic tools

the British analysts and journalists have formed the primary image of 'Russia', adding to it the new features and expanding the mental essence – the concept 'Russia'. So in the British public mind the image-concept 'Russia' is created in the form of a huge-scale, aggressive country, with rich resources used to create offensive weapons aimed at neighboring European states, as well as secretly or manifestly interfering in the affairs of other countries. President V. V. Putin built this country with the help of dictatorship and is not going to leave his post, despite the protests of the democratically-minded opposition. He tries to preserve Christian and family values, cultural achievements but his propaganda is not worth to believe. The results of our study also show that only a few comments were written objectively and unbiased. The smaller part of the publications is neutral and positive. These articles mainly concern the cultural and religious sides of the image-concept of "Russia".

The scheme of analysis offered in this article can be applied to the investigation of image-transformations of other states. It can be used in the courses for linguists, journalists and politicians.

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