

ФИЛОЛОГИЯ

УДК 811.111:316.77:070

REPRESENTATION OF THE CHELYABINSK REGION IN THE US MEDIA

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Abstract. The role of the foreign media is crucial in representation of the domestic issues. The objective of the authors is to reveal and analyze frame structures, textualized in the American media, covering the life of the Chelyabinsk region. The study mainly draws on World Modelling theory and Strategic framing theory, hence the most relevant linguistic methods and techniques are discourse analysis, framing analysis, interpretative analysis, the contextual and syntagmatic analysis. Macroframes, frames, slots, enhancing the aspects of the media image of the backbone Russian city of Chelyabinsk, are systematized. The research contributes to media linguistics and urban studies. In practical terms, it provides a deeper understanding of the problems that negatively affect the reputation of the city and require strategic decisions on the part of the local administration.

Keywords: media linguistics, mediatization of communication, representation, industrial city, Chelyabinsk, American media

1. Introduction

The role of media communication in transforming processes of society is closely associated with mediatization. It manifests itself through the growing influence of the media on all spheres of culture and society making public those aspects of life that deserve special attention. The problems of the South-Ural region with the capital city of Chelyabinsk have recently been under increasing coverage in the world media, which makes it crucial to analyze the media reality, generated in the world press discourse. The research could result in developing an adequate strategy for promoting the Chelyabinsk region in the media sphere and ensuring a favorable perception of the seventh largest industrial city of Russia.

In the last decade, the number of media texts about the South Ural region of Russia has increased significantly. Due to the openness of the 'global village', representations of the Chelyabinsk region in the world media contribute to making it part of a global society system. According to the analytical agency Smyslografiya, through 2011–2016 period the Chelyabinsk region was shortlisted in the top 10 rating of perception of Russian regions by leading foreign media [URL: <https://up74.ru/articles/news/93956/>]. At the same time, migration from the seventh largest Russian industrial city has dramatically increased by 2018 [URL: <https://74.ru/text/gorod/2021/05/31/69942407/>]. Why does the cosmopolitan city face a depopulation crisis?

The authors want to find out how the image of a strategically significant Russian region is constructed by American newsmakers. The authors focus on the issues related to the Chelyabinsk region that have been discussed in the American media, including social problems, and their effects on the reputation of the territory.

The research is designed to provide a rationale for media representations of Chelyabinsk as one of the major Russian industrial regions in the American media. To do this, the authors draw on the tenets of discourse analysis [Van Dijk, 2016], cognitive linguistics [Babina et al., 2017], and the theories, explaining the processes and results of the mental and linguistic representations of reality in discourse and their role in modeling social interaction [Entman, 1993; Van Gorp, 2005]. The authors also take into account some premises, shared by Russian scholars, in the field of mediatization and its effects in communication [Gureeva, 2016; Klushina, 2018].

The present research develops the project initiated by a group of scholars at Chelyabinsk State University in 2021, which revealed the specificity of media representations of social problems in twin-cities [Koval'chuk, 2021; Kushneruk, 2021; Mamonova, 2021; Asmus et al., 2021; Novikova, 2021; Samkova, 2021]. The cognitive aspect of the digital communication of the Chelyabinsk region administration has been subject to linguistic analysis as well [Kurochkina et al., 2022].

The authors aim to study various aspects of the industrial region life that proved newsworthy in the American press, and systematize frames as the basis for the representation of Chelyabinsk to a foreign reader. The mediatization of the life of a large industrial city of the Russian Federation is analyzed in the aspect of profiling frame structures in the discourse-world. In media communication, frames function by offering schemas of interpreting situations or events, which makes public particular issues.

The materials for the analysis have been retrieved from the American press during the period from 2010 to 2021. The total number of texts is 271 units, containing 482 tokens of 'Chelyabinsk'. The identification of how ideas about the Chelyabinsk region are formed in the discourse of the American media is based on the analysis of the syntagmatic relations of the lexeme.

2. Materials and methods

The reality is interpreted through mental representations, which enable people to conceive the world beyond their reach. The notion of *representational structures* is used in World Modelling Theory [URL: https://discourse-world.ru/electronic-library/stati_na_angliyskom_yazyke/], which mainly draws on European and Russian advances in discourse studies and cognitive linguistics [Ogneva et al., 2022; Ogneva, 2019; Van Dijk, 2016; Gavins et al., 2016].

World-modelling is defined as structuring information about reality in the form of texts, united either by a particular topic, or function, or communicative intentions of the agents of discourse, which induce mental representations of varying degrees of conceptual complexity [Kushneruk, 2019].

Representational structures are mental constructs in nature. They arise from the needs of communication and project in discourse certain ‘pictures of reality’. Employing the term ‘representational structures’, the authors argue that complex mental constructs are textualized. They relate to the processes and results of reality representation in accord with the intentions of communication.

Following text world theorists (J. Gavins, E. Ogneva, N. Tincheva, P. Werth), we distinguish between two types of representational structures — discourse-worlds and texts-worlds — and see them as cognition-bound constructs resulting from organizing mental structures in discourse, which ‘simulate a reality’ [Tincheva 2018, p. 298].

In the present paper, we focus on the discourse-world of the city and propose an approach to studying representation of the Chelyabinsk region in the US media through the analysis of frames.

3. Discourse-world of the city as a representational structure

The *discourse-world of the city* is modeled on the basis of messages about the South Ural region of Russia. It is defined as a fragment of reality that presents a dynamic system of meanings about its capital Chelyabinsk and the whole region, projected in the American media discourse. The *discourse-world of the city* is objectified in an aggregate of texts having reference to different aspects of the cosmopolitan city life [Asmus et al., 2021, p.101].

The *discourse-world* is considered to be a semantic macrostructure. As the idea of multilayering of conceptual structures is supported by modern scholars, we stipulate that the discursive structure can be characterized through the prism of multidimensionality, i.e. encompassing both simple and complex conceptual components [Babina et al., 2017]. With this in mind, within the conceptual space of the discourse-world we single out different frame-types, which contribute to world-modelling and its effects. World-modeling is realized by means of framing, which highlights particular aspects of life over others. Framing can induce a variety of understandings of an issue.

Framing is a process of making some aspects of a perceived reality more salient than others [Budaev et al., 2022; Entman, 1993]. It is a potent tool of persuasion and forming attitudes. We distinguish between *generic* and *issue-specific*

frames that shape the public opinion and understanding of the urban life [de Vreese, 2005; Godefroidt et al., 2016; Kushneruk, Kurochkina 2022; Semetko et al., 2000]. Generic frames describe general features of news that can apply across different topics, times and cultural contexts, while issue-specific frames apply to a certain issue, subject or topic [Godefroidt et al., 2016, p. 781].

As we focus on the media representation of Chelyabinsk region in the American media discourse, the identification of macroframes, frames and slots seems relevant. The prefix *macro-* designates a conceptually complex structure, containing generic and issue-specific elements, which are textualized in the American press. Macroframes are treated as the ‘cognitive pillars’ of the discourse-world. They consist of a variety of frames co-existing within the conceptual space of the discourse-world. Frames are specified by slots emphasizing a certain aspect of an issue. Media framing is considered to be a process, which is aimed at ‘nudging’ recipients towards particular attitudes and social positions. The configurations of the conceptual elements mentioned above constitute the ‘idiosyncrasy’ of the discourse-world of the city.

Analyzing the media texts about the Chelyabinsk region, the authors rely on *The Policy Frames Codebook*, which contain fourteen categories of frame dimensions, including *Cultural identity frames* and *Security and defense frames*. According to the research, both categories can be «applicable to any policy issue» and «in any communication context» [Boydston et al., 2014, p. 6-7]. *Cultural identity frames* relate to the social norms, trends, customs, values of a culture. *Security and defense frames* centre around threats to security, protection of a society (individuals, in-groups, nation). We employ these dimensions to the news stories about the Chelyabinsk region.

4. Analysis

Cultural identity

The macroframe draws on characteristics of a group of people that are united by their specific cultural code, behaviour, and thinking patterns. The people of the South Ural share a sense of belonging to their territory and possess a distinct culture, cultural symbols, values, traditions, events, policy issues. The main constituent frames used in news coverage of the Chelyabinsk region are «Culture», «Economy», «Authorities», and «Sport».

The **Culture** frame evolves representations of the capital city, its current development, symbols and events of the urban life. The list of characteristics Chelyabinsk is associated with is represented by the identifiers focusing on: its location, e.g. ‘*the Urals city of Chelyabinsk*’, ‘*the Russian city of Chelyabinsk in the southern Urals*’; history, e.g. ‘*the historic Russian city of Chelyabinsk*’; industry, e.g. ‘*an industrial city at the footsteps of the Ural Mountains*’; secrecy, e.g. *formerly secret city*. It is primarily represented as a historical and industrial city, located in the southern Ural part of Russia.

One of the iconic cultural symbols of the capital city is the monument to the «father» of the nuclear bomb I. V. Kurchatov, erected in 1986 for the 250th anniversary of the city. The reference to the Soviet times is observable in the context. Cf.: *A remarkable Soviet-era monument lies on the outskirts of the formerly secret city of Chelyabinsk.* (Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 21.10.2021). A detailed description of the monument is given, which emphasizes its size (*a larger-than-life statue of Igor Kurchatov*) and the symbolic meaning (*two monolithic slabs of granite depicting the foundational nuclear-weapons event: the splitting of the atom*). Fig. 1.



Fig.1 – Monument to Igor Kurchatov in Chelyabinsk

Few cultural events of Chelyabinsk have been mentioned in the American press. In 2015, it was a house made of thousands of champagne bottles, built by a resident in one of the villages of the Chelyabinsk region. The father built the house in memory of his passed away son. The event became newsworthy because of its original design, due to which the object was called *an architectural oddity*.

Two more newsworthy events happened in 2021 when the pandemic was in full swing. The first featuring an 83-year-old Chelyabinsk woman appeared in the online edition of Vogue Italia after overcoming COVID-19 (entrepreneur.com, 20.03.2021). The pandemic resulted in the decrease of the cultural «distance» between different parts of the world and the «convergence» of the concepts of *global* and *local*, opening up opportunities for the South Ural city to participate in the Mercedes Benz Fashion Week Russia world fashion week. Cf.: *There was also a special introduction of talent from the Ural region of Russia. Participants in the Long Fashion Weekend in Chelyabinsk got a chance to impress a much wider audience* (Forbes, 28.04.2021).

The development of the regional capital city was discussed in 2017 due to the masterplan, chosen by the City Administration of Chelyabinsk to activate the

city's existing grid structure. Against this positive backdrop, an acute social problem came to be obvious. Cf.: *Similar to many medium-sized Russian towns, Chelyabinsk has been a victim of urban migration* (ArchDaily, 4.02.2017). The metaphor 'victim' is very strong in the context. It implies that the city suffers from the increasing social problem. In fact, many young people move from the region to the 'urban hubs' such as Moscow and St. Petersburg. The transformation of the historic Russian city of Chelyabinsk is a plausible way of its development. The change is seen as an upgrade that could generate interest from the young people and other residents.

The **Economy** frame draws attention to various types of industry, with the leading role assigned to the metallurgical and the nuclear, which constitute the main sectors of the economic life of the region. Obviously, the industrial output is given particular priority. Cf.: *The Chelyabinsk Pipe Rolling Plant, The Ural Instrument Engineering Plant in Chelyabinsk*, etc. Media sources describe the production of pipes for Nord Stream 2, which is the main gas pipeline from Russia to Germany through the Baltic Sea: *The logo of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project is seen on a pipe at the Chelyabinsk pipe rolling plant in Chelyabinsk, Russia*.

The Chelyabinsk region is also associated with the site allocated for the processing of nuclear waste sent from the Andreyeva Bay. Cf.: *For 15 years, specialists from Russia, Norway, Sweden, the UK, and Italy have been working on systems to handle spent nuclear fuel in the Andreyeva Bay and to have it removed from there. Thus, in summer 2017, the spent nuclear fuel would be uploaded and will be taken gradually to the Mayak plant in the Urals' Chelyabinsk region for further processing* (TASS, 13.04.2017).

Another important aspect of the Economy frame is the **Jobs** slot. It is reported that job opportunities have been created for citizens of Kazakhstan, bordering the region in the southeast. Cf.: *Although the Russian and Kazakh economies are reeling from the slump in the price of oil – both countries' main export – nearby Russian cities such as industrial Chelyabinsk remain a magnet for job seekers* (Voice of America, 4.03.2016). The city is metaphorized as a 'magnet' that attracts labor migrants.

The **Power** frame provides interpretations of the interaction between local leaders and the President of the country. Thus, 2020 was the year when the activity of the President during the pandemic and his decisions in relation to the regions were discussed in the foreign media. Cf. the headline: *As Russia reopens, Putin takes a back seat to local leaders*. The idiom 'to take a back seat' means to occupy an inconspicuous place, play a secondary role. American journalists claim that the Russian President is making a conscious choice to abandon the image of the head of state who permanently remains in control of 'the vertical of power'.

2019 publications yield contexts that reveal details of punishment in the prisons of Chelyabinsk emphasizing improper detention conditions for prisoners. The reference to the precedent name *Gulag* accentuates the injustice on the part of the

prison staff who are called 'successors / heirs of the Gulag'. Cf. headline: ***Heirs Of The Gulag? Russia's Prison System Faces Harsh Scrutiny*** (RadioFreeEurope, 3.02.2019).

Activation of the **Sport** frame indicates the successful performance of the South Ural athletes, mainly in hockey, boxing and speed skating. The frame is induced in the media discourse due to precedent names, the names of leading sports teams and clubs, as well as sports events. Cf.: [Kravtsov] *the 21-year-old is back home in Chelyabinsk, Russia; Kravtsov going back to Russia after five games to play for Traktor Chelyabinsk in the KHL; Traktor Chelyabinsk, a Russian team in the Kontinental Hockey League; ice hockey world championship in Chelyabinsk in Russia* (New York Post, 17.10.2021).

The American press consistently keeps Sergey Kovalev (known as *Krusher*), the former world champion in the light heavyweight category, in the spotlight. He is known to be the only Russian in history to win the title of the best boxer of the year according to The Ring magazine. Cf.: *Sergey Kovalev Isn't A Gangster; He's Russian* (Deadspin, 17.11.2016).

Security and defence is another macroframe that stands out in the media coverage of Chelyabinsk. This macroframe contributes to the understanding of threats and dangers, namely natural, anthropogenic, technogenic, social and socio-biological, as well as ways to protect people in the environment of an industrial region.

The **Natural hazard emergencies** frame has the key slot *Meteor impact*. This semantic field has been built up as a result of the reports on the event that became a universal precedent in 2013. According to Associate Professor of Chelyabinsk State University S. Zamozdra (TIME magazine refers to) the size of the space object was more than 600 kg. Cf.: *We think the whole thing weighs more than 600 kg». Sergey Zamozdra, an associate professor at Chelyabinsk State University, told the Interfax news agency that the chunk is probably one of the 10 biggest meteorite fragments ever recovered.* (TIME, 16.10.2013). The cited characteristic places the fireball in the top ten largest ever observed (cf. the headline: *Meteorite Pulled From Russian Lake Is One of World's Biggest*).

Since that time, the precedent situation has been firmly fixed, establishing the association based on the model «Chelyabinsk» — «meteorite explosion». «Anchoring» on the above mentioned fact frequently occurs in the American media to denote a threat from outer space, which poses a danger to the whole world.

The fall of the Chelyabinsk meteorite triggers the launch of an international information campaign and the adoption of the Asteroid Day declaration at the UN (June 30, 2016), which aims to raise people's awareness of the asteroid danger and its prevention (cf. *Asteroid Day is an annual reminder of threats to the Earth*). This fact leads to the multiple discursive actualizations of the Security and defence macroframe in a range of publications.

The **Anthropogenic emergencies** frame specifies situations threatening people's livelihoods, which in a broad sense arise as a result of the activities of

humans themselves. In the period under review, they are not numerous with only a gas explosion in a residential building (2019) and an oxygen explosion followed by a fire in a hospital (2020) to quote. Cf.: *The baby is the fifth person pulled alive from the collapsed block in Magnitogorsk, an industrial city in Russia's Chelyabinsk region near the border with Kazakhstan.* <...> *Gas blasts have become a relatively common occurrence in Russia over recent years as the country struggles to cope with aging Soviet-era infrastructure and loose safety requirements, according to Reuters.* (myfox8.com, 1.01.2019).

The **Technogenic emergencies** frame generates meanings about incidents caused by the use of technologies in production or in other words accidents at industrial enterprises.

Consequently, the American media tackle the problems and threats posed by the nuclear industry many of which are rooted in the Soviet past. Chelyabinsk, along with Windscale (northern England, 1957), The Three Mile Island (USA, 1979) and Chernobyl (Ukraine, 1986), appears on the list of places historically «marked» by nuclear accidents. An error at the Mayak processing plant (Ozersk) in 1957 led to an explosion and contamination of an area of 20 thousand square kilometers, which was not indicated on any map. Cf.: *In 1957 a mistake in the reprocessing plant led to an explosion that contaminated 20,000 square kilometres – an area that did not appear on any map. Nor did the nearby town of Chelyabinsk, which was a so-called 'secret' or 'closed town' for Mayak nuclear complex workers.* (Greenpeace International, 29.09.2017).

The region has been called *'a dumping ground for nuclear waste by the Soviet Union'*. The lake Karachay is considered to be *'one of the most polluted sites on Earth'*. It is so toxic that, according to measurements in 1990, one hour spent on the beach is enough to receive a lethal dose of radiation. More than 20 years have passed since then. One would like to hope for changes for the better.

The **Nuclear catastrophe** slot is regularly objectified due to the precedent situations of the previous years. In a wider range of journalistic practices, Russia is presented as a source of radioactive danger to Europe. Cf. headline: *Mysterious 2017 radioactive cloud over Europe originated in Russia, researchers say. The nuclear release most likely originated in the Mayak reprocessing plant, in the Chelyabinsk region near the border with Kazakhstan, the report stated.* (SFGate, 30.07.2019). According to the publication, a nuclear emission occurred at the Mayak plant in the Chelyabinsk region near the border with Kazakhstan.

In the period from 2018 to 2021 the **Social emergencies** frame shows the life of Chelyabinsk by depicting the activity of local opposition cells preparing for protests against the legitimate government, and actions against Navalny's associates. Particularly indicative in this regard are the contexts containing statistics. Cf.: *Navalny Detained In Moscow At Anti-Putin Rally. Additionally, 164 were detained in Chelyabinsk and 63 in Tolyatti.* (RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, 5.05.2018). During this period attacks on supporters of the oppositionist are also

reported. Cf.: *On Thursday, a Navalny ally was beaten up by unidentified attackers in the Urals city of Chelyabinsk.* (International Business Times, 10.09.2020).

The media presentation is designed to evoke readers' sympathy for the victims of violence and at the same time condemn the actions of the authorities. The following context highlights the ill-treatment at the hands of the security officers. Cf.: *In Chelyabinsk, more than 1,000 miles east of Moscow, one man shouted that he "can't breathe" as security forces pinned him to the ground.* (Washington Post, 31.01.2021).

The **Pandemic** slot is the most significant within the **Socio-biological emergencies** frame. It is conspicuous in 2020 in connection with the problems following the spread of coronavirus. Curiously enough the American media turn a blind eye to the achievements of Russian medicine, instead they focus on the controversial issues related to the fight against infection.

This is especially noticeable in the headline that points up the fact that in Russia it is doctors who belong to the category of vaccination skeptics. It must be recognized as an appeal to authority. Cf.: *Every country has vaccine skeptics. In Russia, doctors are in their ranks.* The main text of the publication contains the words of a representative of the junior medical staff, who, like his colleagues, takes a wait-and-see attitude. Cf.: *"I've recently recovered from Covid-19, so I still have antibodies", said Natalya Romanenko, a nurse in the Chelyabinsk region. "None of my colleagues are planning on getting it now. I might get it later, but first we need to see how people manage with it".* (CNN on MSN.com, 23.12.2020).

5. Conclusion

The present research focuses on the discourse-world framework of the Chelyabinsk region through the prism of American media. Being a view from the outside and at a distance mediatization of the region targets its most salient features both positive and negative that are epitomized in a system of frame structures among which the most critical macroframes are the **Cultural identity** and the **Security and defence** ones. They provide a thorough many-sided vision of ongoing events. They are considered as conceptually complex mental and linguistic constructs realized by aspectual frames with a focus on particular manifestations of life.

The **Cultural identity** macroframe is structured by frames that generate ideas about culture, economy, power, sports, which are further detailed in corresponding slots. Over the last eleven years the image of the industrial region of Chelyabinsk has been molded through the interpretation of cultural symbols and events, types of industry, especially metallurgical and nuclear, interaction of the President with local authorities. The city is predominantly associated with sports such as hockey, boxing and speed skating.

The **Security and defence** macroframe brings to the fore the issues of natural, technogenic, anthropogenic, social and socio-biological nature related to the activities of the region at present and in the Soviet times. The life of the metropolis

is represented mainly through situations that have received the status of precedent. The key ones are the meteor impact, accidents at nuclear plants, opposition protests, and the coronavirus pandemic.

To crown it all, this particular study reveals essential features of urban identity in general by systematizing its inherent cognitive components in terms of the Cultural identity and the Security and defence macroframes. In case of the Chelyabinsk region both macroframes turn out to be equally detailed in the media context with the Security and defence macroframe carrying predominantly negative connotations as the nature of the frame suggests.

The authors believe that further research into the mediatization of the life of Chelyabinsk in the mass media of different countries is quite promising and will yield a “picture from the outside”. It seems promising to audit media representations of the metropolis in the foreign media in order to detect and review the problems that negatively affect the reputation of the city and require strategic decisions on the part of the local administration.

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Submitted: 02.04.2023

Accepted: 24.05.2023

РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЯ ЧЕЛЯБИНСКОЙ ОБЛАСТИ В СМИ США

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Аннотация. Зарубежные СМИ играют значительную роль в репрезентации внутренних проблем российских регионов. Задача данного исследования – выявление и анализ фреймовых структур в текстах СМИ США, освещающих жизнь Челябинской обла-

сти. В методологическом плане исследование опирается на положения теорий когнитивно-дискурсивного миромоделирования и стратегического фреймирования. Авторы производят дискурсивный и фреймовый анализ, применяя интерпретативный и контекстуальный метод, а также метод анализа синтагматических отношений. В результате исследования систематизируются макрофреймы, фреймы и слоты, выделяющие ключевые аспекты медийного образа Челябинска, одного из крупнейших российских городов. Полученные выводы вносят вклад в медиалингвистику и урбанистику. В практическом плане проведенный анализ дает более глубокое понимание проблем, негативно влияющих на репутацию города-миллионника, и требующих стратегических решений со стороны местной администрации.

Ключевые слова: медиалингвистика, медиатизация коммуникации, репрезентация, промышленный город, Челябинск, американские СМИ.

Получена: 02.04.2023

Принята: 24.05.2023