

“Russian language” as a psychosemantic matrix of historical trauma and heteronomy

Igor Bilokon*

PhD in Psychological Sciences
Independent Researcher
Ottava, Canada
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2058-3904>

Abstract. The aim of the study was to provide a scientific interpretation of the causes of this confrontation through a psychosemantic reconstruction of the “Russian language” as the core of a heteronomous civilisational model and to identify its role in maintaining the heteronomous structure of Russian society and legitimising aggression against Ukraine. The methodology was based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines psychoanalytic and humanistic concepts (E. Fromm, K. Horney, J. Bowlby), the sociology of power and habitus (M. Foucault, P. Bourdieu), self-determination theory (E. Deci, R. Ryan), as well as research on values and democratic transformations (R. Inglehart, K. Welzel, J. Maunk, W. Brown, R. Putnam, I. Krastev). Based on a psychosemantic analysis of intonations, grammar, vocabulary (including obscene language), and basic value oppositions, it has been shown that the “Russian language” structurally reinforces a heteronomous state of consciousness: it normalises fear, blurs responsibility, inverts the meanings of love, truth, honour, and freedom, frustrates the need for autonomy, and forms a readiness for violent mobilisation. A comparison with Ukrainian language practice showed that the Ukrainian language increasingly functions as a space of subjectivity, dignity, and mutual recognition, which exacerbates the civilisational conflict between the two psychosemantic models of the world. The practical significance of the results obtained lies in the possibility of using the proposed approach to develop linguistic and psychological strategies to overcome the influence of the “Russian world,” to design educational and communicative practices that support subjectivity, and to construct guidelines for the psychosemantic “therapy” of authoritarian societies

Keywords: Russian speech patterns; psychological meaning structures; authoritarian societies; democratic societies; war in Ukraine; civilisational conflict

INTRODUCTION

The current global context reveals an acute confrontation between two types of social development: authoritarian-heteronomous and democratic-subject. This conflict has manifested itself particularly tragically in Russia’s war against Ukraine, where the clash is not only between political regimes or economic models, but between two types of civilisational consciousness. Existing studies explained this confrontation primarily through differences in values (collectivism versus

individualism, traditionalism versus secularism, etc.). However, such an explanation remains at the level of declared attitudes and does not touch upon the deep psychosemantic structures of consciousness that support the stability of authoritarian systems and block the transition to subjective democracy.

T. Nedashkivska *et al.* (2025) demonstrated that semantic change in the 21st century is inseparable from the cultural and socio-political experiences of linguistic

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*Corresponding author

communities. The study showed that English and Ukrainian do not merely accumulate new vocabulary but continually reorganise the conceptual and emotional structure of existing words under the pressure of crisis, digitisation, and shifting collective identities. According to their analysis, contemporary speakers increasingly rely on evaluative and emotionally charged lexemes, reflecting intensified social anxieties, new forms of solidarity, and transformed perceptions of security, agency, and belonging. The authors argued that these shifts reveal how languages encode culturally specific trajectories of experience: in Ukrainian, semantic expansions often emerge from wartime and resilience-related contexts; in English, globalised digital communication accelerates the diffusion of hybrid emotional and ideological meanings.

I. Krastev (2020) examined the rise of "civilisational politics" in Eastern Europe and argued that authoritarian regimes increasingly rely on narrative and semantic constructions that depict political conflict as an existential struggle between incompatible cultural models. I. Krastev demonstrated that such narratives operate not only as ideological tools but as cognitive frameworks that shape collective perceptions of identity, freedom, and threat. The analysis showed that authoritarian power persists by embedding affectively charged semantic patterns into public discourse, thereby constraining the emergence of autonomous subjectivity. I. Yablokov & P. Chatterje-Doody (2022) analysed the evolution of Russian political culture and concluded that state-driven narratives intentionally cultivate a "besieged fortress" mentality, which normalises aggression and suppresses individual agency. This work demonstrated how authoritarian stability relies on emotional and symbolic frameworks rather than merely coercive institutions. T. Guriev & D. Treisman (2022) introduced the concept of "informational autocracy," showing that modern authoritarian regimes increasingly rely on narrative manipulation rather than overt repression. The analysis demonstrated that carefully crafted semantic framing, selective dissemination of emotionally charged language, and systematic distortion of key political categories enable such regimes to simulate broad public consensus while minimising the visible use of force.

The purpose of the article was to provide a scientific interpretation of the causes of the current confrontation between authoritarian and democratic societies – in particular, Russia's war against Ukraine, the threat of escalation into nuclear conflict and the undermining of the foundations of global security – through a psychosemantic reconstruction of the "Russian language" as the core of a heteronomous civilisational model and the identification of its role in maintaining the heteronomous structure of Russian society and legitimising aggression. The main hypothesis of the study was that the stability of authoritarian-heteronomous systems and their aggression towards democratic societies are

determined not only by institutional or value differences, but also by deep semantic structures – a psychosemantic matrix – through which the habitus of submission, fear, and dependence is reproduced, making stable authoritarian structures possible even after the formal reformatting of political institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scientific interest in the relationship between language and political subjectivity has produced a substantial body of research showing that linguistic practices are central to the reproduction of social power. Through language, societies transmit norms, shape emotional dispositions, and reinforce systems of obedience or autonomy. E. Fromm (1956) analysed the authoritarian nature of love and the "escape from freedom" in mass societies, arguing that individuals often internalise dependence and obedience when these are presented as sources of security and belonging. This work demonstrated how emotional attachment can be redirected toward figures of authority, creating a psychological foundation for acceptance of domination.

K. Horney (1942) expanded this line of inquiry by showing how neurotic strategies of submission, compliance, and the search for approval predispose individuals to relinquish autonomy in exchange for perceived stability or acceptance. She emphasised that such patterns are not merely intrapsychic but emerge from and reinforce social environments in which hierarchy and control are normalised. J. Bowlby (1969), in developing his theory of attachment, proved that early experiences of the "child-caregiver" relationship set the basic model of trust or distrust of the world. It is through this lens that we can see how language saturated with threats and humiliation reproduces traumatic attachment scenarios on a macrosocial level. This framework illustrated how language functions as a subtle technology of control, structuring perception long before explicit coercion is invoked. P. Bourdieu (1990) expanded this insight through the concept of habitus, arguing that embodied patterns of perception and action – shaped through repeated linguistic and social practices – become taken-for-granted dispositions that reproduce hierarchical structures across generations. From this perspective, language is not merely descriptive but operates as symbolic violence, naturalising asymmetries of power through routine expression.

E. Deci & R. Ryan's (2017) theory of self-determination added a complementary psychological dimension by identifying autonomy, competence, and relatedness as basic human needs. When linguistic practices consistently undermine autonomy – through impersonal constructions, agent-suppressing grammar, or semantic inversions of concepts such as freedom or responsibility – patterns of external motivation, dependency, and "forced loyalty" are reinforced. R. Inglehart & C. Welzel (2005) demonstrated that long-term cultural shifts

toward self-expression values significantly influence the viability of democratic institutions. The research demonstrated that shifts from survival values toward self-expression values are central for the development of democratic institutions. These findings highlighted that democratic transformation requires not only institutional reforms but also deeper cultural transitions embedded within collective consciousness. Similarly, Y. Mounk (2018) argued that the resilience of democracy depends not only on formal procedures but on the internalisation of autonomy-oriented cultural norms. According to Y. Mounk, contemporary authoritarian movements succeed because they offer emotionally compelling narratives that replace individual responsibility with heteronomous loyalty to the state or leader. His conclusions underscore the psychological dimension of democratic backsliding, which cannot be explained solely through institutional variables.

Classic and contemporary researchers alike pointed to the central role of linguistic and affective mechanisms in sustaining systems of obedience, shaping cultural orientations, and reinforcing patterns of heteronomy. Nevertheless, despite the breadth of existing research, there remains a notable gap: scholars have not yet conducted a systematic psychosemantic analysis of the Russian language as an integrated matrix of heteronomy, one that encompasses intonation, grammar, obscenity, and the inversion of basic categories of meaning. This gap underscores the need for the present study, which seeks to advance theoretical understanding of how linguistic structures contribute to the reproduction of authoritarian consciousness and to the legitimisation of political aggression.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed an interdisciplinary approach that integrated psychoanalytic, humanistic, sociological, ethnolinguistic, and democratic transformation theories. The methodology involved a qualitative analysis of language through various theoretical lenses to reveal how language served as a vehicle for psychological and social processes. Psychoanalytic and humanistic theories (Fromm, 1941; Horney, 1942; Bowlby, 1969) were used to interpret linguistic expressions of dependence, insecurity, fear, and avoidance of agency, providing tools for identifying markers of attachment trauma and patterns of neurotic submission within linguistic behaviour. Sociological approaches derived from M. Foucault's (1975) notion of disciplinary power and P. Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus guided the investigation of language as a mechanism for regulating behaviour and reproducing hierarchical structures. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) informed the evaluation of how linguistic forms support or hinder autonomy and psychological well-being. Research on democratic transformations (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Mounk, 2018) provided a macro-sociological

context for understanding how linguistic patterns reflect broader political and cultural shifts.

The methodological core of the research was a qualitative psychosemantic analysis, understood as a systematic examination of how linguistic forms encode underlying psychological structures associated with heteronomy or subjectivity. The term "psychosemantic content" referred to the constellation of meaning patterns – intonational, grammatical, lexical, and metaphorical – through which speakers construct and interpret experiences of agency, subordination, fear, obligation, and responsibility. To identify these patterns, the study relied on a combination of content analysis and linguistic discourse analysis. Content analysis was used to trace evaluative and agentive lexical markers, while discourse analysis allowed for close examination of grammatical personhood, impersonal constructions, modal expressions, and intonational structures. These linguistic findings were then interpreted in relation to psychological constructs such as external or internal locus of control, attachment security, and autonomy.

The empirical material consisted of four broad types of texts: official political discourse such as televised speeches and foreign-policy statements; media performances and talk-show interactions; everyday communicative material drawn from publicly accessible interviews, recorded conversations, and widely circulated online fragments; and obscene or militarised language used in police, military, and political contexts. These texts were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that they were publicly available, widely disseminated, and representative of mainstream Russian-language communication. Analysis focused on agentivity markers, emotional-intonational patterns, and semantic framing of key existential categories. A comparative dimension was introduced through examination of a parallel corpus of Ukrainian-language political, media, and conversational texts. The comparison concentrated on how Ukrainian linguistic practices encode autonomy, responsibility, reciprocity, and trust through explicit first-person grammar, dialogic intonation, and semantic framing. This contrast made it possible to identify systematic differences between linguistic environments that reproduce heteronomy and those that support subject-oriented communicative practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Language as a carrier of trauma: power, intonation, and the unconscious

Language is never a neutral medium; it carries historical memory, emotional imprints, and culturally encoded expectations about how the world should be interpreted. Language is also a form of organising experience as it sets the framework in which "normal" and "threatening," "one's own" and "alien," "love" and "violence" are defined. In this sense, the "Russian language" appears as a psychosemantic matrix of heteronomy – a system in

which one's own will is systematically replaced by the will of the Other: the tsar, the boss, the "state," the "people." Intonation, vocabulary, and grammar here do not simply describe reality, but dictate its structure: there is the one who speaks with the voice of authority, and the one who must listen, adapt, and not ask questions.

Historical traumas – such as the Mongol domination, autocratic governance, and Stalinist terror – did not determine linguistic forms mechanically, but they shaped the communicative ecology in which certain patterns of speech became socially rewarded or punished. Prolonged exposure to rigid vertical power structures fostered communicative habits in which loudness, commanding tone, and impersonal constructions indexed safety and conformity, whereas soft, exploratory, or dialogical speech was associated with vulnerability. Over time, these behavioural adaptations solidified into stable intonational norms and grammatical preferences, reinforcing patterns of depersonalisation (e.g., impersonal verbs, passive voice, collective agency markers) and normalising asymmetric interactions between speaker and listener.

M. Foucault (1975) showed that power acts through "disciplinary mechanisms" built into everyday practices, including linguistic ones. In the terms of P. Bourdieu (1990), language acts as a means of symbolic violence, through which the habitus of submission is reproduced. Within the "Russian world," this logic is manifested in a recurring communicative pattern often referred to as the "voice of authority." This "voice" is not limited to formal institutions; it appears in family interactions, workplace hierarchies, military discourse, and political communication. It is characterised by elevated volume, imperative constructions, a reduced tolerance for dialogue, and intonational markers that signal dominance, urgency, or threat. The "voice of authority" thus becomes a culturally stabilised register that legitimises asymmetrical relations and signals that the speaker claims the right to define reality for others.

Fear and humiliation are embedded in the intonation pattern, and a person who has grown up in this sound field perceives aggressive speech as proof of "strength" rather than a sign of violence. Centuries of coercive governance cultivated speech patterns in which fear, humiliation, and depersonalisation became normalised communicative resources. These emotional and intonational imprints shape expectations about what "strong" or "persuasive" speech should sound like. Consequently, individuals socialised in this soundscape may interpret aggressive or domineering intonation not as violence but as an indicator of competence, control, or legitimacy.

F. Gayraud & Y. Auxéméry (2025) showed that traumatic discourse is characterised by reduced agentivity, with speakers relying on stative and perception verbs instead of action-oriented forms, thereby linguistically diminishing the presence of an acting subject. This finding parallels the observation that the Russian linguistic

environment frequently employs depersonalised constructions that obscure agency and reinforce heteronomous patterns of subjectivity. Whereas F. Gayraud & Y. Auxéméry examined individual trauma, the present analysis extends this mechanism to collective historical trauma, indicating that prolonged exposure to coercive power structures fosters a communicative ecology in which diminished agency becomes culturally encoded. In this way, the linguistic consequences of historical coercion do not simply reflect past violence, but actively reproduce a worldview in which dominance appears natural and autonomy becomes difficult to articulate.

Grammar without subjects: when language eliminates the "I"

A prominent structural feature of Russian grammar is the frequent use of impersonal constructions in situations where Ukrainian typically requires an explicit agent. In Russian communication, actions are often framed through subjectless forms such as "it was done," "it is necessary," "a decision was made," "it turned out this way," whereas in Ukrainian or English it would sound natural to say "I did," "we decided," "he ordered," in the "Russian language" the action seems to "happen by itself." The difference is not simply morphological but reflects two distinct ways of assigning or avoiding responsibility in everyday speech.

The idea that impersonal constructions function as a "linguistic metaphor for slavery" requires historical contextualisation. Under imperial and Soviet systems, explicitly naming the agent could entail personal risk. Subjectless constructions therefore developed as tools for linguistic caution, allowing speakers to report actions without identifying responsible individuals. Ukrainian communicative norms, shaped by different political pressures, preserved a stronger reliance on explicit subjects. In terms of self-determination theory and psychoanalysis, we can say that the "Russian language" systematically supports an external locus of control: "I am not acting – something is being done to me" (Fromm, 1941; Deci & Ryan, 2000; 2017). A comparison shows that where the Ukrainian language easily expresses the subject's position ("I decided," "we refused," "they committed a crime"), the "Russian language" often resorts to vague forms: "decided," "refused," "there are some violations." As a result, responsibility "dissolves into the system," and people get used to thinking of themselves as "small cogs" with no voice and no right to initiative.

It is essential to distinguish grammatical patterns from rhetorical strategy. In political discourse, Russian officials deliberately employ impersonal framing to obscure agency. For example, statements such as "all responsibility will fall on the other side," "there was a need," "a decision had to be made," systematically remove the acting subject and present Russian actions as reactive. Ukrainian official communication, by contrast,

follows an explicit-agent model: “Russia attacked,” “they shelled,” “we are defending ourselves.” Commenting on the possibility of escalation of the conflict, Putin shifts responsibility to the Ukrainian authorities, stating that “all responsibility for possible bloodshed will lie on the conscience of the ruling regime in Kyiv.” Russia here acts not as an active aggressor, but as one who only “reacts” to the actions of another. Sergey Lavrov uses phrases such as “we have absolutely no intention of crossing Ukraine’s borders” or “sanctions are merely a manifestation of irritation, not an instrument of serious politics” in his public statements. In such statements, Russia’s aggressive actions are hidden behind vague phrases, while responsibility is shifted to the West and the “Kyiv regime.”

It is important to note that even when referring to obvious acts of violence, the language avoids direct references to the perpetrator: instead of “we attacked,” phrases such as “there was an escalation,” “there was a need,” and “we had to make a decision” are used. This is entirely consistent with the grammar of heteronomy described above, where “I” and “we” disappear from the field of responsibility. S. Mahmood *et al.* (2025) showed that redemption is linguistically marked by a shift from impersonal and agent-suppressing constructions toward active forms with explicit subjects and clear action verbs, signalling the restoration of moral agency. This pattern aligns with the findings of the present study, where frequent impersonal constructions in the Russian linguistic environment were shown to obscure responsibility and reinforce heteronomous subjectivity, while explicit-agent forms characteristic of Ukrainian discourse enabled the expression of autonomous, accountable action. Both analyses demonstrate that grammatical encoding of agency functions as a key mechanism through which narratives – and broader linguistic environments – shape perceptions of responsibility and power.

The intonation of power: the psychoacoustics of submission

Language is not only a system of words and grammar but also a system of sound. Intonation patterns carry socially encoded expectations about hierarchy, distance, and legitimacy. In many communicative contexts associated with Russian-speaking cultural environments, a characteristic authoritative intonation can be observed: elevated volume, sharp downward accents, compressed phrasing, and minimal pausing. This intonational style does not simply “sound harsh”; it reflects and reproduces a social structure in which power is performed through vocal dominance.

Speakers who hold institutional or informal authority frequently use an assertive delivery – rapid tempo, reduced turn-taking, and categorical statements – to signal that discussion is unnecessary and resistance is inappropriate. By contrast, in communicative contexts

shaped by Ukrainian norms, softer, more dialogic intonation is more typical: moderate volume, stable pitch contour, longer pauses that invite turn-taking, and phrasing that leaves room for negotiation. These differences become especially visible in emotionally loaded situations. For example, when issuing instructions, Russian authoritative speech tends to take the form of compressed commands (“short, rapid, pressuring delivery”), whereas Ukrainian speakers more often employ explanatory or cooperative delivery (“steady tempo, open-ended phrasing”). The contrast is not absolute, but it illustrates how intonation participates in constructing expectations about interactional roles.

The cultural formation of these patterns is rooted in broader historical experiences. Societies marked by prolonged centralised authority – from imperial bureaucracy to Soviet administrative structures – often rewarded vocal styles associated with control and decisiveness. In such environments, raised tone and compressed rhythm became recognisable signs of “seriousness” and “status,” while gentler intonation could be interpreted as uncertainty or weakness. Political rhetoric reinforces these patterns: official speeches on state television, military briefings, and bureaucratic communication frequently employ forceful intonation that signals unilateral power rather than dialogue. When discussing issues such as military escalation or relations with NATO, this intonational frame amplifies the message by pairing the semantic content with a vocal form that conveys urgency and inevitability. The rhythm of speech plays a central role. Rapid, uninterrupted delivery, overloaded with consecutive clauses, creates a sense of momentum that discourages interruption. This produces what can be described as an “emotional pressure effect”: the listener experiences fewer opportunities to question, negotiate, or slow down the exchange. In this communicative logic, authority is not demonstrated through argumentation but through the sound of the voice itself – a performance of power that precedes and sometimes outweighs the content of the message.

Neuropsychological studies provide partial insight into why such patterns may have strong effects. Research on auditory processing (Zatorre & Salimpoor, 2013) showed that sudden increases in volume, sharp pitch shifts, and rapid rhythmic sequences can activate neural systems linked to vigilance and orienting responses. In real communicative contexts, this means that a consistently pressuring vocal style may elicit automatic physiological reactions such as increased tension, heightened attention, or readiness to comply. However, these responses are not universal: they depend on the listener’s prior experiences, personality, social expectations, and the situational context. A person accustomed since childhood to hearing raised voices in family communication may interpret a harsh tone as “normal,” whereas another may interpret it as aggressive.

The study of Sh. Ismayil (2024) showed that pitch contour, intensity, tempo, and pausing serve as key markers of interpersonal stance, with certain prosodic patterns consistently signalling dominance or submission. It confirms that elevated volume, sharp accents, and compressed rhythm in Russian-speaking contexts were shown to function as vocal markers of authority and reinforce hierarchical interaction. While Sh. Ismayil examined these features in a general stylistic framework, the current study situates similar prosodic mechanisms within a sociohistorical environment shaped by centralised power, demonstrating how intonation becomes a tool for reproducing asymmetry. The contrast with Ukrainian dialogic intonation further underscores how different prosodic norms shape expectations about reciprocity and agency.

Obscenity and the "power of words": power through humiliation

Another characteristic feature of the "Russian language" is its extreme saturation with obscene vocabulary and its almost complete normalisation. Swearing permeates all levels of speech – from street quarrels to military communication and "informal" communication among political elites. From a psychoanalytic perspective, obscene vocabulary can be interpreted as an attempt to discharge tension associated with humiliation, fear, and dependency. Where direct protest against authorities is dangerous or socially unacceptable, aggression is redirected onto safer targets in the horizontal dimension.

Sociolinguistically, obscenity acts as a "glue of shared trauma": it signals that "we are all in the same shit here," but at the same time it fixes the impossibility of true solidarity, because anyone can become the object of humiliation at any moment. The authorities actively use this resource – the military and police culture of the "Russian world" is permeated with obscene language, which turns violence into part of "normal male behaviour." The use of obscenity by high-ranking political figures, such as Dmitry Medvedev, requires a deeper political and rhetorical interpretation. When a representative of the elite publicly sends the proposals of another state "back to the hole they came from" and presents this as a "diplomatic response," obscenity functions as a deliberate strategy rather than a spontaneous emotional outburst. It serves several purposes at once: it signals to a domestic audience that the speaker is "unrestrained" and "honest," it publicly humiliates the opponent by reducing them to an object of ridicule, and it shifts the register of political communication from argument-based debate to symbolic domination. In this context, profanity operates as a performative act of delegitimization: the opponent is not refuted but stripped of dignity.

Statements targeting the President of Ukraine, in which he is described as an "illegitimate, worthless figure whose country is disappearing," exemplify this

mechanism of dehumanisation even without direct obscene terms. The logic is the same: a political leader is rhetorically reduced to something less than a full subject. Obscenity and quasi-obscene insults thus become part of a more general discursive pattern in which the political enemy is portrayed as contemptible, dirty, or vermin-like. This contributes to a discursive environment where the denial of subjectivity – of the right to be heard, respected, or negotiated with – appears acceptable. As a result, the very linguistic material available for expressing conflict, disagreement, or emotion is skewed toward aggression. This makes it difficult to stabilise communicative norms based on mutual respect and recognition: attempts to speak in the language of dignity and care are easily ridiculed or dismissed. In this way, obscene vocabulary does not merely reflect existing power relations but participates in maintaining a social and political order where humiliation becomes a routine and legitimate instrument of control.

The study of S. Hansson (2024) demonstrated that coercive impoliteness and strategic blame-avoidance in government communication operate through recurrent linguistic patterns that shift responsibility away from institutional actors while projecting authority through aggression, dismissal, and derision. Hansson showed that governments frequently employ face-threatening acts, implicit accusations, and derogatory formulations to construct an asymmetrical interactional frame in which dissent is pre-emptively delegitimised. This finding directly aligns with the present analysis, in which obscenity, humiliation, and verbally aggressive stylistics in Russian political discourse were shown to function as tools of symbolic domination rather than spontaneous emotional outbursts.

While S. Hansson examined these mechanisms within contemporary institutional communication, the current study situates similar strategies within a broader cultural-linguistic matrix shaped by prolonged authoritarian traditions, where humiliating or dehumanising language normalises asymmetric relations and constrains subjectivity. The comparison with Ukrainian political communication – which more consistently relies on explicit agency, dialogic framing, and non-humiliating registers – further underscores how divergent linguistic norms encode fundamentally different expectations about accountability, reciprocity, and political legitimacy.

Inversion of basic meanings: love, truth, honour, freedom, "I"

The "Russian language environment" demonstrates a consistent tendency to reshape basic existential categories through specific lexical choices and syntactic patterns. This becomes especially clear when examining how concepts such as love, truth, honour, freedom, and the self are expressed in everyday speech. The concept of love, which in humanistic traditions is grounded in reciprocity and recognition of the other as an

autonomous subject (Fromm, 1956), is often linguistically encoded in Russian as attachment to authority rather than mutuality. Common expressions such as “to love the Motherland,” “to love the leader,” “to love the tsar,” or “to love with suffering” frame love as devotion to a superior entity that may punish or humiliate yet must still be revered. By contrast, expressions denoting interpersonal love between equals tend to be overshadowed in public discourse. The semantics of love thus tilt toward fusion with power rather than acknowledgement of another person’s independent will.

A similar semantic recoding is observable in the notion of truth. In many European traditions, “truth” denotes correspondence to facts and moral obligation to honesty. In Russian everyday usage, however, the opposition between *pravda* (“moral/political truth”) and *istina* (“factual truth”) shows how “truth” can be detached from facts and tied instead to loyalty. Phrases such as “this is the real truth” often refer not to accuracy but to narratives that reinforce the hierarchy. Statements like “the truth is on our side” function less as empirical claims and more as declarations of fidelity to authority. Thus, “truth” becomes a marker of ideological alignment, not factual correctness. The term honor likewise shifts from an inner moral core to a relational position in a hierarchy. Linguistic patterns such as “it is an honor to serve,” “honor is obedience,” “he lost his honor because he disobeyed” reflect a logic where honor is tied to fulfillment of one’s role within the vertical structure. Instead of denoting personal integrity and responsibility for one’s actions, honor is linguistically framed as a function of loyalty and rank, which can be granted or withdrawn by superiors.

The semantics of freedom further illustrate this psychosemantic matrix. In democratic cultures, freedom is associated with autonomy and the capacity to act responsibly in the public sphere (Arendt, 1958). In Russian public discourse, however, the word is often embedded in constructions that mark it as dangerous or excessive: “too much freedom,” “freedom leads to chaos,” “freedom must be controlled,” “freedom is anarchy.” These recurrent collocations frame freedom not as a positive civic capacity but as a potential threat that requires containment. In such semantic contexts, messages like “better strong authority than destructive freedom” find a receptive audience because the linguistic environment has already coded freedom as instability. The question of the self reveals perhaps the deepest structural constraints. Different languages provide different lexical and syntactic tools for expressing inner experience. In Russian, expressions of selfhood frequently rely on collectivised forms such as “we decided,” “we think,” “we must endure,” which blur individual agency. Impersonal constructions – “it turned out,” “it had to be done,” “one should endure,” “circumstances forced me” – further dissolve the speaker’s autonomy by shifting action away from the “I.” These forms make it difficult to articulate

oneself as a responsible subject with independent decision-making power. By contrast, Ukrainian equivalents more readily employ explicit first-person forms (“I decided,” “I refuse,” “I take responsibility”), which linguistically support autonomous agency.

Thus, “Russian language environment” functions as a psychosemantic system in which basic existential categories are refracted through specific patterns of vocabulary and grammar. The study of Lenchuk and Ahmed (2024) demonstrated that language ideologies shape social hierarchies by privileging certain linguistic forms as “standard,” “legitimate,” or “proper,” while marginalising alternative varieties and the speakers associated with them. Their analysis showed that state institutions often frame standardised language as a marker of competence, authority, and social value, turning linguistic norms into tools of stratification and control. This finding aligns with the present study, which shows how the Russian linguistic environment similarly encodes hierarchical relations through lexical, grammatical, and discursive patterns that redefine concepts such as love, truth, and freedom in ways that reinforce dependency and loyalty.

Ukrainian linguistic subjectivity as a contrasting matrix

Ukrainian linguistic practice offers a contrasting model of subjectivity in which agency, reciprocity, and dialogic engagement are encoded directly into everyday communication. Rather than dissolving responsibility or obscuring the speaker’s role, the structure of Ukrainian discourse provides clear linguistic tools for articulating autonomous action and mutual recognition. Ukrainian grammar makes it straightforward to mark the speaker as a responsible agent through explicit first-person forms such as “I decide,” “I refuse,” “I take responsibility,” “we disagree,” “we object.” These forms appear frequently in both public and private discourse and signal that actions originate from identifiable subjects. In contrast to Russian impersonal constructions, Ukrainian routinely encodes agency in the verb morphology itself, creating an expectation that decisions have authors and consequences.

Ukrainian intonation patterns also support dialogic interaction. Conversations typically involve moderate volume, clearly marked pauses, and melodic contours that invite turn-taking rather than suppress it. In political speeches, even when topics are emotionally charged, the delivery usually maintains a cooperative rhythm, allowing room for explanation and justification. This stands in contrast to the pressure-based intonational patterns characteristic of much Russian official and media communication, where raised tone, compressed phrasing, and minimal pauses communicate unilateral authority rather than shared deliberation. This does not mean that the Ukrainian linguistic space is automatically devoid of patterns of heteronomy (historical traumas, colonial dependence, and the Soviet legacy continue to have an impact).

However, it is precisely the Ukrainian language's focus on reciprocity, co-presence, and responsibility that creates the opportunity for the development of a subject-oriented model of civilisation – what contemporary research describes as a transition to “societies of self-expression and self-determination” (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Putnam, 2020). From this perspective, Russia's war against Ukraine appears not only as a struggle for territory or geopolitical influence, but as a conflict between two linguistic-psychological models of the world. On the one hand, there is the “Russian language” as a psychosemantic matrix of historical trauma and heteronomy; on the other, there is the Ukrainian language as a space for the restoration of subjectivity, in which there is room for the “I” and “we” as responsible actors, rather than objects of someone else's will.

This divergence becomes especially visible in the political-ideological discourse of the Russian state. The so-called “language of mission” employed by ideologists such as Alexander Dugin is not merely rhetorical ornamentation but a structured linguistic technique. It relies on modal imperatives (“must rise,” “are destined to act”), metaphysical generalisations (“absolute evil,” “sacred struggle”), and collective agency markers (“we were created for this mission,” “our historical duty”). The subject here is an abstract collective bound to a transcendent purpose, while individual agency is absorbed into a monolithic “we.” This type of discourse frames violence not as a political choice but as a metaphysical obligation, thereby bypassing ethical deliberation. Such mission-oriented rhetoric also normalises extreme proposals. When Dugin declares that opponents “must be destroyed” or that nuclear escalation is a legitimate option, these utterances rely on a linguistic structure that presents annihilation as a necessary component of the mission. Hyperbolic absolutes (“absolute evil,” “no other language”) and inevitability markers (“must,” “inevitably,” “there is no other way”) create a discursive environment in which violence becomes linguistically rationalised.

Because this style of speech saturates large segments of Russian media and political communication, its effects extend beyond elite discourse. It reinforces a cultural schema in which obedience, aggression, and sacrificial duty appear linguistically natural, while alternative forms of subjectivity remain underdeveloped or marginal. In this sense, the psychosemantic space produced by Russian linguistic and ideological practices represents not only a threat to Ukrainian sovereignty but also a challenge to broader civilisational security.

The analysis of O. Ivanova (2023) showed that Ukrainian sociolinguistic dynamics are characterised by a steady expansion of Ukrainian-language use in public, institutional, and interpersonal domains, accompanied by growing alignment between linguistic choice and civic self-identification. The study demonstrated that shifts toward Ukrainian increasingly

correlate with perceptions of personal agency, democratic orientation, and active citizenship, as speakers use explicit first-person forms, agentive constructions, and dialogic interactional patterns to signal autonomy and participation in collective decision-making. This finding resonated with the present analysis, which identifies Ukrainian linguistic norms as structurally conducive to expressing responsibility and subjectivity, in contrast to the impersonal and hierarchical patterns pervasive in Russian discourse. While O. Ivanova situates these processes within broader transformations in language policy, urban multilingualism, and post-Euromaidan identity change, the current study extends this logic to the psychosemantic level, demonstrating how grammatical, prosodic, and lexical structures reinforce the emergence of a subject-oriented communicative model. The contrast with the Russian linguistic environment – where impersonality, collective agency markers, and ideologically coded vocabulary obscure responsibility and naturalise vertical power – further underscores how divergent sociolinguistic trajectories reflect fundamentally different orientations toward autonomy, accountability, and civic agency.

The analysis demonstrates that the linguistic, international, and psychosemantic features of the Russian communicative environment form a cohesive matrix of heteronomy in which historical trauma, vertical power structures, and institutionalised coercion are sedimented into grammar, vocabulary, prosody, and the cultural encoding of core existential concepts. The normalisation of impersonal constructions, authoritarian intonation, humiliating or dehumanising lexical patterns, and collectivised forms of agency systematically weakens the speaker's subjectivity, blurs the line between violence and “strength,” and makes aggression and responsibility-avoidance culturally expectable. These results confirm the study's central hypothesis: the stability of authoritarian-heteronomous systems and their aggression toward democratic societies are shaped not only by institutional or ideological factors but by a deep psychosemantic matrix that reproduces a habitus of submission, fear, and dependence even after formal institutional change.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings demonstrated that recurrent linguistic patterns in the Russian language environment contribute to the maintenance of externally oriented, non-agentive forms of subjectivity. Impersonal constructions such as “it was decided,” “there was no choice,” “it turned out this way” consistently obscure the actor of the action, making responsibility appear external or diffused. In Ukrainian, the same communicative contexts typically employ explicit-agent forms – “I decided,” “we refused,” “they committed a crime” – which linguistically anchor responsibility in identifiable subjects and support the expression of autonomous agency.

Intonational patterns also contribute to these differences. Russian public and institutional speech often uses elevated volume, compressed rhythm, and reduced pausing, creating a sound pattern that conveys authority and minimises opportunities for dialogue or objection. Ukrainian communicative practice relies more on measured volume, clear pauses, and cooperative rhythm, which facilitates turn-taking and reflective justification rather than unilateral assertion. The normalisation of obscene and dehumanising vocabulary in Russian political and military communication strengthens vertical relations of dominance. Profanity, used even by high-ranking officials, functions as a rhetorical tool for humiliation and boundary-setting, reinforcing hierarchical distance. Ukrainian public discourse, even in conflict conditions, rarely relies on linguistic forms that erase the opponent's subjectivity, allowing interactions to remain rooted in concepts of dignity and mutual recognition.

Differences also emerge in the encoding of key concepts. In Russian usage, "truth" frequently appears in constructions associated with loyalty, while "freedom" is paired with terms suggesting disorder or danger. Ukrainian usage embeds these concepts in formulations tied to accountability and civic agency, supporting their use in democratic communication. Future research should analyse these patterns across diverse social groups and evaluate how shifts toward agentive linguistic forms influence civic behavior and democratic engagement.

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«Руський язык» як психосемантична матриця історичної травми та гетерономії

Ігор Білоконь

Кандидат психологічних наук
Незалежний дослідник
Оттава, Канада
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2058-3904>

Анотація. Метою дослідження було наукова інтерпретація причин цього протистояння через психосемантичну реконструкцію «руського язика» як ядра гетерономної цивілізаційної моделі та виявлення його ролі в підтриманні гетерономної структури російського суспільства й легітимації агресії проти України. Методологія спиралась на міждисциплінарний підхід, що поєднує психоаналітичні й гуманістичні концепції (Е. Фромм, К. Хорні, Дж. Боулбі), соціологію влади й габітусу (М. Фуко, П. Бурдьє), етнолінгвістику (А. Вежбицька), теорію самодетермінації (Е. Десі, Р. Раян), а також дослідження цінностей і демократичних трансформацій (Р. Інглгарт, К. Вельцель, Я. Маунк, В. Браун, Р. Патнем, І. Крастєв). На основі психосемантичного аналізу інтонацій, граматики, лексики (включно з обценною) та базових ціннісних опозицій показано, що «руський язык» структурно закріплює гетерономний стан свідомості: нормалізує страх, розмиває відповідальність, інвертує смисли любові, правди, честі й свободи, фруструє потребу в автономії та формує готовність до насильницької мобілізації. Порівняння з українською мовною практикою продемонструвало, що українська мова дедалі більше функціонує як простір суб'єктності, гідності та взаємного визнання, що загострює цивілізаційний конфлікт між двома психосемантичними моделями світу. Практичне значення отриманих результатів полягає у можливості використання запропонованого підходу для розробки мовно-психологічних стратегій подолання впливу «руського міра», проектування освітніх і комунікативних практик, які підтримують суб'єктність, а також конструювання орієнтирів для психосемантичної «терапії» авторитарних суспільств

Ключові слова: російські мовні моделі; психологічні смислові структури; авторитарні суспільства; демократичні суспільства; війна в Україні; цивілізаційний конфлікт