

Information and Psychological Security of the Media Space. Ukrainian Experience of Implementation of Psycholinguistic Component Into Media Education

Інформаційна та психологічна безпека медіапростору. Український досвід впровадження психолінгвістичного компонента в медіаосвіту

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ABSTRACT

The **article** covers the Ukrainian experience of the of integrating a psycholinguistic component into media and information education, which we consider as one of the most important elements of the information security control system in the media space.

The psycholinguistic component **aims at** providing special knowledge and skills for analysing linguistic means and non-linguistic tools used in the media to enhance the impact on the reader's world view (media and information literacy), identifying fraudulent messages to prevent access to personal data (cyber literacy). This component also involves the acquisition by the media consumer of the skills of identifying the methods and techniques used by journalists to influence the reader. These skills allow analysing texts and understand the author's intentions and purpose, as well as identifying the used means and methods of influencing the reader.

We have designed a course of media and information education for journalists and consumers of media products in order to help them fully navigate the modern information and communication space and effectively counteract disinformation. **The course aims to:** (1) the formation of competence in the field of media, information and cyber literacy; (2) inclusion in the media literacy course of the basics of psycholinguistic analysis of materials; (3) the development of cyber literacy.

The research used such **methods** as questionnaires, analysis and synthesis, arrangement, and systematization of theoretical and empirical material, psycholinguistic analysis of text.

Conclusions. In the study, the psychological readiness of a media specialist to counteract manipulative informational and communicative influences is considered within the scope of the activity approach and in relation to such individual characteristics as motivational, cognitive, informational-technical, emotional-volitional, and moral-ethical competences. A media specialist's possession of all these competencies is necessary for the formation of a stable psychological readiness to resist manipulative influences.

Key words: psycholinguistic component, text analysis, media, information and cyber literacy.

Introduction

Psycholinguistics gives a wide range of possibilities for investigating verbal and written communication. One of these is applying the psycholinguistic approach to examine media content and identifying psycholinguistic methods and tools employed by modern journalism to influence the worldview of the audience. Therefore, the implementation of the methods of psycholinguistic analysis of text is relevant for developing media, information and cyber literacy skills as well as enhanced Information and Psychological resistance to malicious

and manipulative information. Integration of the psycholinguistics component includes the development of essential skills in analysing information and knowledge of psycholinguistic methods and tools applied by journalists. This holistic approach guarantees the safe and informed use of online resources and helps prevent the negative impact of harmful information on readers.

The study has shown that for developing psychological resilience against manipulative influences, media consumers need to possess basic knowledge and skills in media literacy. This includes familiarity with psycholinguistic methods and techniques of text analysis as well as an awareness of the intricacies of mind manipulation tactics. In addition, mastering the psycholinguistic aspects of media education develops media consumers's analytical thinking skills, enhances their ability to logically analyse information through the operations of analysis, synthesis, generalisation, and comparison. It also helps to improve their skills in understanding the intentions, purpose and means used by the author of a text to influence the reader. Moreover, it also helps to improve consumer's skills of comprehending the motives, objectives, and strategies employed by the authors of texts to exert influence over the reader.

Therefore, **the aim of our study** was to examine effective ways and means for improving media literacy and achieving information security in the media space by media professionals and consumers of media products.

In this regard, we consider the introduction of a psycholinguistic component in media and information education to be one of the most important measures to strengthen the system of control over information security in society. We consider media and information education itself to be an effective psycholinguistic tool for improving the skills of media professionals: students – future specialists in the media industry and consumers of media content. This involves developing their literacy in the media, information and cyber spheres, as well as mastering the skills of psycholinguistic analysis of texts. In addition, the psychological component of media education is aimed at improving analytical and critical thinking skills, and at developing the ability to evaluate information and come to appropriate conclusions.

The current relevance of media education is determined by seven principles that were proposed by Masterman (1985):

- a high level of media consumption associated with the availability of information thanks to ICT (information and communication technologies);
- the possibility of using mass media as a platform for promoting political and economic interests, ideology with the aim of influencing the worldview of the audience;
- growth of online media resources and self-expression platforms (social networks, blogs, etc.);
- influence of mass media on democratic processes and politics;
- the development of ICT, which contributes to the spread of influence through visual means of communication;
- the need to understand the basic principles of a media specialist's activity;
- concentration of media resources in the hands of individual personalities, parties, etc.

It is advisable to supplement the mentioned principles with a mandatory requirement to strengthen the protection of personal data and classified information and developing psycholinguistic skills of information analysis.

Personal data protection is related to cyber literacy, in particular, working with modern technologies to check information (for example, photos), as well as protecting closed data (private information, closed files of investigative journalists, etc.). These questions concern the cyber literacy of both a specialist and an average consumer of media products. They are also required to have knowledge, expertise, and data protection skills to prevent manipulation and hacker attacks. The relevance of this aspect of media literacy is determined primarily by the situations in which media specialists (and not only) can be subjected to powerful attacks by hackers and social engineers (Krylova-Grek, 2019). For example, DDoS attacks on the Zhytomyr.info news site, doxxing as a means of intimidating or harassing a journalist (Trokoz, 2021; Doxxing, 2021).

Meanwhile, the persons with media and information literacy can, as evidenced by one of the key documents of UNESCO, not only adequately evaluate information, but also create their own media messages (UNESCO, 2013a). At the same time, they are aware of the functions of mass media in a democratic society.

In general, media and information literacy implies – in accordance with the provisions of the UNESCO program (2021) – the subject’s possession of

“a composite set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies and practices that allow effectively access, analyse, critically evaluate, interpret, use, create and disseminate information and media products with the use of existing means and tools on a creative, legal and ethical basis” (Media and Information Literacy, n.d.).

In addition, the activity of a media specialist, like any other activity, requires constant professional development and self-analysis. It requires daily maintenance of a decent professional level, self-regulation, protection against professional deformation and burnout. However, the specifics of a media specialist’s work do not always contribute to this. And it often does not allow for consistent adherence to the key provisions of international documents regarding media literacy and its implementation in practice.

Media specialists are known to operate large amounts of information (with possible manipulative content) and often have time constraints for processing and checking data. Therefore, in practice, they are not always ready to counteract harmful effects, and therefore, can use poor-quality material in their work.

However, media specialists bear professional and social responsibility for the content they create and the consequences it may cause. Therefore, such specialists must possess a number of relevant knowledge, abilities, skills and certain personal qualities – in the end, psychological readiness to counter manipulative influences in the media space. The relevance of their acquisition in modern conditions is emphasized in UNESCO international documents (UNESCO, 2008). The formation of such psychological readiness is, in our opinion, the factor that contributes to the professional and media-informational growth of a specialist.

Research on the quality of national media content also points to the expediency of education in the field of media and information security. Thus, the Institute of Mass Information established that online media agencies often resort to publishing manipulative materials and fakes, thus violating professional standards of journalism. In the framework of a study which was conducted in January 2021 in 10 regions of Ukraine,

8.720 news texts were analysed, 210 of which had manipulation, and 11 – fake news. It was discovered that the most common types of manipulation are the publication of ordered materials (puff piece) – 43.0%, presentation of evaluation judgments as fact – 20.0%, incomplete information – 19.0%, increase or decrease in the amount of factual data – 9.0%, use of manipulative names – 7.0%, involvement of biased and pseudo experts in data evaluation – 4.0%. The study also showed that in 2021, most Ukrainian news with manipulations was published by the online media in Dnipro and Poltava (Institute of Mass Information, 2021).

At the same time, practice has shown that the introduction of courses to increase the level of media and information literacy is for Ukraine and its citizens the main way to neutralize the negative informational and communicative impact on the audience. The importance of media and information literacy courses introduction is also indicated by the low level of critical thinking of the population, which is confirmed, in particular, by a study conducted by an NGO Media Detector. The report on the comprehensive study of media literacy in Ukraine (2021) states that 32.0% of the audience determine the credibility of the news intuitively, without checking the facts, establishing sources, or analyzing the text; 25.0% of citizens tend to trust the news if it does not contradict their point of view and is similar to the truth; 11.0% of content consumers trust almost all information in the media and change their opinion only when they read a refutation (Index of media literacy in Ukraine, 2021).

The study also proved that education in the field of media and information literacy is related to the formation of *media competence* in an individual, i.e. a set of relevant motives, knowledge, abilities and skills. These components should be evaluated according to motivational, informational, contact, interpretive, activity and creative indicators. The formation of the above-mentioned indicators contributes to the development of critical thinking, professional creation of media texts and competent analysis of modern media activity.

A media culture researcher Winterhoff-Spurk focuses mostly on the technical aspects of informational competence. The latter, in his opinion, include the ability to use special programs, the possession of programming skills, the conscious use of ICT by a content consumer, etc. (Winterhoff-Spurk, 2007).

Therefore, within the limits of media and information literacy, the development of an ICT competence by a media specialist should not be neglected. In other words, an individual's ability to use special resources (photos, files, digital data, etc.) to check the validity of data contributes to a clearer orientation in the media space, critical analysis of information and, ultimately, the achievement of information security.

Methods

The research used such scientific methods as questionnaires, analysis and synthesis, arrangement, and systematization of theoretical and empirical material. The psycholinguistic component of the course aims at providing special knowledge and skills for analysing linguistic and non-linguistic means used in the media to enhance the impact on the reader (media and information literacy), to detect fraudulent attacks by social engineers and to protect personal and other important data (cyber literacy).

It should also be noted that in the operative circulation of research we use the term '*media competence*' which scientists define as the ability to analyze, evaluate and transmit messages. It should be added that this term is mostly used to describe the media literacy of an average audience that consumes, shares content, and creates social media posts and comments (Kubey, 1997; Baacke et al., 1999; Blumeke, 2000; Pottinger, 1997; Tulodziecki, 1997).

Results and Discussions

The study showed that the issue of improving the qualification of media specialists in the field of media and information literacy in Ukraine is being solved by introducing appropriate courses, training sessions and seminars. Thus, in September 2021, the International Research and Exchange Council (IREX) launched a training program for journalists called 'Resilience to influences and safety of journalists: how to work in the era of information chaos'. The training featured such areas as resistance to informational influences and security. The first direction included tasks to improve critical thinking skills, awareness of the audience's vulnerability, countering cognitive biases and stereotypes.

The security direction consisted of solving digital, psychosocial and physical security tasks. We should mention that in their search for an effective means of ensuring media and information literacy of consumers, scientists focus mostly on media and information education of media specialists.

Meanwhile, in 2013 UNESCO presented the concept of media and information literacy (MIL) as an umbrella under which falls a wide range of skills and abilities needed in the modern world by both media professionals and content consumers and bloggers. The document emphasizes that the concept of the MIL strategy is aimed at developing the ability to perceive news and television content, develop computer, network, and digital literacy skills, as well as literacy in the field of social media (UNESCO, 2013b).

As an additional component, we consider cyber literacy which is aimed at developing the skills to counter hacker attacks, provocations by social engineers, and protect personal and confidential information (Gurak, 2001).

Let us now examine in detail the components of media and information literacy, the need for an autonomous analysis of which is emphasized by a number of scientists and the above-mentioned international organization. This is an individual's competence in the field of the media, information, and cyber literacy.

Media literacy is designed to form an idea about the specifics of the media's work, the influence of external conditions, the ability, and skills to evaluate content, understand external factors that influence the creation of a media product (UNESCO, 2011: 18).

The important tasks facing media literacy specialists are the development of their ability to perceive, analyze, evaluate and create their own media texts, as well as the awareness of civic responsibility for the content of disseminated information (International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, 2001). Therefore, in media literacy classes, the participants are taught not only to interpret, but also to responsibly create media products, develop critical thinking skills, formulate problems and ask questions (Marchis et al., 2008).

Information literacy is defined as the ability of an individual to find and sort information. The Association for Educational Communications and Technology considers information literacy as a cornerstone of the ongoing learning process. Users should be able to collect and critically

evaluate, select, and process information, know which tools should be used to verify the collected data (Byerly et al., 1999).

Cyber literacy makes it possible to comprehensively approach the issue of verification, analysis and protection of information. It means that an individual possesses the skills of safe use of Internet resources, the ability to distinguish malicious sites and check files for viruses, detect social engineering attacks, and is able to protect personal data and confidential information.

In addition, media and information literacy share such common aspects as their interdisciplinary nature, the use of ICT, the acquisition of critical thinking skills for information analysis, the acquisition of psychological stability by an individual in countering manipulative informational and communicative influences, the possession of skills necessary for personal data protection and countering attacks by social engineers.

Hence, being media and information literate for media specialists means having cognitive and practical skills that enable them to find relevant information, critically evaluate it and communicate it to the audience in accordance with ethical principles.

Obtaining the above-mentioned knowledge and skills takes place, as it has already been mentioned, through adult education: appropriate courses, training sessions, seminars, etc.

However, under the current difficult social situation, the potential of existing media and educational activities, as the research showed, is no longer sufficient to fully address the issue of raising the professional level of modern media specialists, especially students as future media workers. This also applies to a wide audience of media content consumers, whose media competence is often not enough to effectively counter the manipulative media and informational influences of propaganda.

Considering this circumstance, as well as taking into account the results of theoretical and empirical research, a media and information education course was developed for a wide audience. Clearly, the course is aimed at improving the professional level of media specialists and students as future specialists in the media. However, its special goal is media education for many consumers (average readers, bloggers, etc.) of media products for their full orientation in the modern

information and communication space and effective countermeasures against disinformation.

In addition, a distinctive feature of the media literacy course developed by us is its special emphasis on the development of skills necessary to perform psycholinguistic analysis of materials and cyber literacy. Therefore, we included in the media literacy course the basics of psycholinguistic text analysis and the humanitarian aspects of cyber security, which should contribute together with the formation of an individual's ability to adequately evaluate texts, psychological resistance to manipulative and other harmful information, to the development of an individual's cognitive abilities (Krylova-Grek, 2018, 2019; Krylova-Grek et al., 2020).

In the study, the psychological readiness of a media specialist to counteract manipulative informational and communicative influences is considered within the scope of the activity approach and in relation to such individual characteristics as motivational, cognitive, informational-technical, emotional-volitional, and moral-ethical competences. The possession of all these competencies by media specialists is necessary for the formation of their psychological readiness to counteract manipulative influences.

While designing the course on the development of media and information literacy, we relied on the theoretical provisions of Leontiev (1999) speech activity theory. However, we pay attention to the role of the reader and transforms him/her from a passive object of influence into an active subject of influence in the process of media activity. Such a role change makes it possible to understand the motives, goals and tasks that influence a media specialist's choice of tools (linguistic and non-linguistic means) with the help of which a media text is created.

The media and information literacy training course developed and tested by us was designed as a balanced course containing both theoretical material and practical classes.

A special place in the *theoretical* part of the course should be given to the basics of psycholinguistic text analysis which helps the listener to see the relationship between linguistic techniques and the psychological impact that a media specialist seeks to achieve. When analyzing textual material, it is also important to take into account the educational level, cultural and ideological affiliation of the person who created a message and the one who reads the message. In addition, the

same context can be perceived unequally by different (in age, education, gender, vocation, tasks, etc.) audiences.

In the psycholinguistic analysis of the text, one of the main competences of the reader is their ability to abstract from their own beliefs and ideology and evaluate only textual and illustrative material, factual data.

In this regard, in the *practical* part of the training course, we recommend mastering (with the help of tasks, specially created exercises, etc.) not only general, but also psycholinguistic text analysis. This will make it possible to find out what linguistic techniques, methods, intentions, archetypes and stereotypes the author uses to influence the reader and whether this influence has a suggestive character.

The reader as an object of the media specialist's informational and communicative influence is mostly impacted by the following methods and techniques of text construction: systematic repetition of information; emphasis on certain news; dissemination of a large amount of irrelevant information (the so-called *junk news*) and focusing attention on it; use of stereotypes, archetypes; personification and personalization of messages; one-sided coverage of events; using the opinion of third parties; catchy headlines; the use of emotionally charged messages; analytical materials as a method of influence; deepening the meaning of the text through paralinguistic means. Therefore, the tasks and exercises aimed at the development and training of certain skills offered to the course participants must necessarily cover all the mentioned aspects of influence.

In the process of performing practical tasks, a course participant, being the object of influence of a media specialist, gets the opportunity (as already mentioned) to stand in the place of the subject of influence, i.e. the author of the text, to understand the technology of creating a publication. This contributes to the development of his/her ability to evaluate texts more competently in the information field, to understand the techniques used by a certain category of authors to manipulate the consciousness of the audience, to spread the language of hatred and disinformation (Kruger et al., 1999; Divina, 2017).

Let us now give an example of the results obtained in the framework of an online course on media and information literacy which was conducted by us in April 2020 with the support of the international charitable foundation "Caritas". Forty-six people were involved in

the work on the development of media and information literacy. The average age of the group was thirty-eight years.

To determine the effectiveness of the course, we conducted a survey of the participants *before* and *after* they completed the course. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: checking the media and information literacy and assessing the cyber literacy of the participants. We also developed the criteria (indicators) according to which the development levels of media and information and cyber literacy of the participants were measured.

A part of the questionnaire called 'media and information literacy' (MediaL) included a series of questions to diagnose an individual's ability to distinguish quality journalistic materials from fakes and manipulations. As a result, 59.3% of the participants completed most of the tasks correctly: they have a high and medium media and information literacy development level. The remaining participants of the online course, namely 40.7%, made numerous mistakes, thus, they experience significant difficulties in distinguishing between high-quality and manipulative (or fake) materials. A low level of media and information literacy development was recorded among these participants.

A part of the questionnaire called 'cyber literacy' (CyberL) included a series of questions on digital safety and was aimed at determining the degree of these consumers' trust of media products in online communication: phishing, farming, safety of online payments and online surfing.

The course consisted of four classes of 1.5 hours each and featured the following topics:

(1). Signs of fakes and manipulations, methods of checking information and the validity of statistical data, familiarization with expert opinion, establishing differences between fact and judgment, basics of psycholinguistic analysis of texts.

(2). Psychological features of information perception: the role of the emotional and sensory sphere, understanding the 'great illusion' of consciousness. The insidiousness of authors of phishing emails.

(3). Paralinguistic means of influencing an individual's consciousness, online tools for checking photos on the Internet. Memory peculiarities when perceiving and processing information.

(4). Social networks: the concept of 'information bubble' and its definition. Algorithms of social networks: ways to minimize the negative

effects of influence. Peculiarities of “cookies”. What is hate speech and how to resist manipulative attacks on the Internet.

Upon the media course completion, its students filled out questionnaires again. As a result, 74.9% of the participants acquired a high and medium level of media and information literacy (cumulative result). Accordingly, a low level of its development was recorded in 25.1% of the students.

A comparative analysis of the data obtained before and after the participants took the media literacy course made it possible to draw conclusions about positive dynamics in the development of their ability to perceive media products: the ability to process material, analyze the content of news and social networks, detect disinformation and manipulation, protect personal data, etc. The results of the course also showed the effectiveness of the online form of education which can be used as an alternative to mixed and offline education.

In the research process, a structural-functional *model* of individual psychological stability formation against the influence of manipulative media content was also built. This model consists of five blocks of special measures: target, methodological, substantive, technological and effective. The key role in the model belongs to the content block, which provides for the practical implementation of the media and information literacy program. This program combines four groups of educational activities:

- acquisition of knowledge, media and information literacy skills; understanding the methods and techniques used by media specialists to spread disinformation, hate speech and various manipulations;
- the development of an individual’s ability to form psychological readiness to counteract manipulative influences through the improvement of his/her cognitive, motivational, emotional-volitional and moral-ethical competences;
- development of and running training sessions and seminars, implementation of special exercises for the development of media and information literacy in various groups of consumers of media products taking into account their education, age, gender and other characteristics;
- creating and running an online course ‘Current media: methods and techniques of influence on auditory perception’ on Moodle.

The implementation of the mentioned measures will contribute to deepening the development of motivational, content and operational

components of their psychological resistance to informational and communicative influences among consumers of media products; updating their psychological readiness for critical perception and understanding of information; developing their ability to counter disinformation and hate speech.

Conclusions

The study has shown that the effectiveness of media and informational education in countering manipulative methods of influence in the modern world is significantly enhanced when a psycholinguistic component is included in its structure. This makes it an even more effective tool for the development of media professionals, students, and contributes to deepening the knowledge and skills of a wide range of consumers in the field of media literacy.

The psycholinguistic component of our course is aimed at providing special knowledge and skills for analysing linguistic means and non-linguistic tools used in the media to enhance the impact on the reader (media and information literacy); identifying fraudulent messages to prevent access to personal data (cyberliteracy).

The concept of media and information education encompasses a wide range of knowledge, abilities, skills, and qualities needed in the modern world by both media professionals and a wide range of media content consumers. Such education is related to self-control, self-regulation of an individual, and requires constant self-development and reflection from a media specialist in order to maintain a decent professional level. The formation of media competence in an individual contributes to the development of his/her critical thinking, adequate assessment, professional creation of media texts and competent analysis of modern media features.

The proposed educational course of media and information education is aimed at forming competence in the field of media, information and cyber literacy in both media professionals and ordinary content consumers and bloggers. It involves mastering the basics of psycholinguistic analysis of materials and acquiring cyber literacy for full-fledged orientation in the modern information and communication space and effective counteraction to manipulative influences and disinformation.

Our **future research** will be devoted to processing the participants of the offline media and information literacy course results owing to the trainer's work and their comparison with the data obtained in the framework of an analogous online course.

ADHERENCE TO ETHICAL STANDARDS

Ethic declarations. Prior to the start of the study, informed consent was obtained from all participants for voluntary participation. The study was conducted in compliance with domestic (Ethical code, 2009) and international ethical standards (American Psychological Association, 2002). The study was approved by the Scientific Ethics Committee of the Scientific Researches of the Public Organization "National Academy of Sciences of Higher Education of Ukraine".

Conflicts of Interest. The author declares no conflict of interest.

Author contributions. **Krylova-Grek, Yu.:** The idea, modeling of the theoretical concept, general design, and formulation of goals of the research, developing, describing and detailed psycholinguistic component of MIL and CL, which contributes to the media literacy education and psychological resilience to information warfare. Organizing and holding the media literacy trainings, gathering data. Translation of the manuscript. **Korniyaka, O.:** participating in modeling of the theoretical concept and general design of the research and participation in formulation the aims of the research, systematizing of the results and summarizing the data of the research, edition of the materials of the research, and preparation of the final version of a manuscript.

Consent for Publication. All authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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АНОТАЦІЯ

У статті висвітлюється український досвід впровадження психолінгвістичного компонента в медійно-інформаційну освіту, яку ми розглядаємо як одну з найважливіших складових системи контролю за інформаційною безпекою в медіапросторі.

Психолінгвістичний компонент спрямований на надання особистості спеціальних знань і навичок для виявлення мовних та мовних засобів, які використовуються для посилення впливу на аудиторію (медійна й інформаційна грамотність); виявлення маніпулятивних повідомлень і запобігання доступу до персональних даних (кіберграмотність).

Психолінгвістичний компонент медіаосвіти має на меті оволодіння особистістю навичками аналітичного мислення за допомогою операцій аналізу, синтезу, узагальнення та порівняння. Він також передбачає набуття навичок встановлення методів і прийомів, що використовуються журналістами для впливу на читача. Ці навички дозволяють аналізувати тексти і розуміти наміри та мету їх авторів, а також виявляти використані ними засоби і способи впливу на читача.

Ми розробили спеціальний курс медіа й інформаційної освіти для журналістів та споживачів медіа-продукції, аби допомогти їм повноцінно орієнтуватися в сучасному медіа просторі й протидіяти дезінформації. Мета курсу: (1) формування компетентності у сфері медіа, інформаційної та кіберграмотності; (2) надання навичок психолінгвістичного аналізу матеріалів; (3) розвиток кіберграмотності.

В дослідженні використані **методи** анкетування, аналізу та синтезу даних, організація та систематизація теоретичного та емпіричного матеріалу, психолінгвістичний аналіз тексту.

Висновки. У дослідженні психологічна готовність медіафахівця до протидії маніпулятивним медіа впливам розглядається в межах діяльного підходу та у взаємозв'язку з такими особистісними характеристиками, як мотиваційна, когнітивна, інформаційно-технічна, емоційно-вольова та морально-етична компетентності. Володіння всіма цими компетентностями є необхідною умовою формування стійкої психологічної готовності медіафахівця до протистояння маніпулятивним впливам.

Ключові слова: психолінгвістичний компонент, ЗМІ, аналіз тексту, медійна, інформаційна та кіберграмотність.