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# KEY IMAGE-BUILDING MECHANISMS OF MODERN RUSSIA IN IBEROAMERICAN MEDIA

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## *Abstract*

The relevance of the study is due to the increased scientific and practical interest in the particularities of representing various socio-political processes characteristic of globalized reality, as well as the use of linguistic and extralinguistic resources for politically beneficial manipulations, instilling certain norms and stereotypes, and rethinking existing realities, including designing an attractive or, conversely, repulsive image of a country. In this regard, the issue of ambiguous media image presentation of Russia in the international arena deserves special attention. The purpose of the study is to identify the main linguistic mechanisms by which a negative, neutral or positive tone of messages about Russia and determining its political rating in the Iberoamerican mass media is formed (2017-2019). The study analyzes the specifics of the selection and combination of language techniques (evaluative vocabulary, various stylistic and rhetorical figures, political terms and clichés), as well as the features of their application in the framework of special manipulative strategies and tactics (selection of information, filtering, overload and amortization, labeling, falsification, solidarity and opposition, the ideology of "post-truth", the phenomenon of "politainment", theatricality and "visualization" of political discourse, etc.). The interdisciplinary nature of the study involves both the use of methods of the linguistic analysis proper (structural-semantic, descriptive-analytical, contextual and stylistic), and methods of related sciences (linguocognitive, linguopragmatic, linguocultural, linguopolitical, etc.). The results obtained during the study allow us to clearly demonstrate how the choice of a strategic vector contributes to the popularization or discrediting the country's political image.

**Keywords:** Iberoamerican media, image of Russia, "friend / foe" opposition, political manipulation, pragmatics.

## 1. Introduction

One of the key features of the study of modern information space is the close attention to the formation of image tools. The image factor (reputation, legend, portrait, role, character, halo, look, pattern, brand, picture, attributes, etc.) represents a corpus of the main and essential abilities of the state system considered as "flagship virtues" and "banner property" of the country and its leader, also used as basic elements for marking, measuring, building and consolidating the political, economic, social, cultural and other top parameters of its ranking on the national and global, contemporary and historical scale (Gadzhiev, 2007, p. 39, Galumov, 2003, pp. 200-202). The increased theoretical and empirical interest in the problem of identifying and successfully implementing mechanisms and algorithms for modeling a politically advantageous image is due to the integrative orientation of research in the field of media communication, the hallmark of which is not so much a neutral-referenced *information strategy* (transmission, reproduction, reflection of reality), but a mobilizing *strategy for manipulation*, rulemaking and ideological imposition of "moderated" stereotypes.

The effects of media exposure on the audience are traditionally considered within the framework of well-known models of mass communication: the theory of subcutaneous injection (H. Laswell), the theory of agenda setting, pseudo-environment and stereotypes (W. Lippmann), the theory of opinion leaders (P. Lazarsfeld), the concept of cognitive dissonance (L. Festinger), the hypothesis of cultivation (G. Gerbner), the concept of one-dimensional man (H. Marcuse), the concept of simulacrum (J. Baudrillard), the concept of the society of the spectacle (G. Debord), the concept of strategic communication (J. Habermas), the concept of global village (M. McLuhan), etc. (as cited in Forchtner & Wodak, 2018). In addition, the phenomena and correlated instruments of manipulation are used to be investigated in theoretical researches as well as in various aspects of practical studies, contributing to linguistic and "near-linguistic" perspective of the present analysis. There is a large number of disciplines linked in this field, including political, social, cultural, anthropological, psychological, communicational sciences and, in particular, advertising and PR-discourse, cf. the use of the concepts that are characteristic of this sphere: "image", "message", "positioning", "brand", "naming", "target audience", "targeted advertising"; including "aggressive marketing" as a form of "violent" communication or "subliminal advertising" as a type of strategic suggestion, etc. (Graver, 2012). A complex combination of different strategies for constructing image media texts promotes the cultivation of a more repulsive (discrediting strategy) or, on the contrary, attractive (popularization strategy) image of a country, depending on the preference for a conflict (unidirectional, aggressive, anti-tolerant, categorical, violent) or a conflict-free (dialogical, tolerant, non-categorical, non-violent, "sedative" vector, the term is ours. – K. I.) communication.

## 2. Problem Statement

Regarding the current image of Russia, we can say that foreign media continue to exploit the idea of its "demonization" as an aggressor country, referring to the usual stereotypes of the historical past, and also emphasizing image attributes such as "autocracy / monocracy", "tsarism", "personality cult / (neo) Stalinism", "authoritarianism", "imperialism", "conservatism / traditionalism", "militarism", "orthodoxy", "patriarchalism", "archaism", etc. (Cherepanova, 2018; Couso Permuy, 2019; Galumov, 2003;

Vinogradova & Mel'nik, 2009). In addition, according to various international ratings, Russia is among the most "unfriendly", "unhappy", corrupt and economically disadvantaged countries of the world (Global Peace Index, Euler Hermes, Corruption Perceptions Index, Legatum Prosperity Index, World Happiness Report, etc.). In this regard, the issues of refuting or confirming the media trend towards "deteriorating" the image of Russia, identifying pragmatic contexts and linguistic means of neutralizing or emphatizing this stereotype, as well as manifesting strategies for "rehabilitation" and "melioration" its political reputation deserve special attention.

## 3. Research Questions

The implementation of the strategy for melioration or deterioration of a political image is based on the selection and combination of language techniques, as well as their application in the framework of special manipulative tactics. In this regard, the task/s of this study is to analyze examples of the functioning of the main linguistic-media mechanisms that clearly demonstrate how the choice of a strategic vector contributes to the popularization or, conversely, discrediting the political image of Russia. Beyond that, the feasibility of the present investigation is due to the specific nature of the multi-vector media image presentation of Russia on the national and global scale of modern linguopolitical reality. The presence of an ambiguous attitude to the explication of political processes taking place in Russia in a foreign media discourse indicates the obvious topicality of the problems under consideration.

Besides, the relevance of the actual research is also emphasized by the insufficient study of various aspects of the Iberoamerican political discourse and the development of this topic on the material of the media of Iberoamerica, since most of the works are traditionally devoted to the English-speaking area and analysis of examples of English media communication (Chudinov, 2010; Forchtner & Wodak, 2018; Horan & Kranert, 2018; Morozova, 2017, etc.). Of particular importance is the coverage of issues related to a comprehensive scientific understanding of the image of Russia, based on a comprehensive analysis of linguistic and near-linguistic material.

As part of the actual study, an analysis of the main verbal and non-verbal mechanisms for representing and building the linguopolitical "brand" of Russia in 2017-2019, during the Presidential elections period as well as the FIFA World Cup 2018, is realized using the examples and illustrations of the most relevant, world-wide and high-impact publications in the news media communication of Iberoamerica (in total, of 22 countries – Spain, Portugal and 20 Latin American countries). The specifics of the coverage of the "Russian theme", which can be observed on the sites of high-quality media resources of Iberoamerica www.prensaescrita.com/, https://www.prensamundo.com/, http://kiosko.net/ (in total about 300 publications), allows to observe the main features of the construction of texts devoted to Russia, as well as to identify the nuances of the realization of the love / hate strategy of its "demonization" and "de-demonization".

## 4. Purpose of the Study

Based on various definitions of the phenomenon of manipulation, which used to be found both in linguistic and "near-linguistic" studies, we can accentuate its top and the most explicit strategy mechanisms.

To begin with, it is expected that the object of manipulation doesn't become aware of the gambit process itself, neither of its methods, effects, as well as the real intention of the actor installing control and realizing the influence, to whom it seems to be useful and profitable. Apart from that, the frame of mind and the way of perception imposed by the manipulator are often assumed to conflict with those of the manipulable. At last, it is of special importance that the manipulation procedure involves both conscious / rational and unconscious / perception patterns, relying on visible and hiding manipulative tools (persuasion vs suggestion, instincts, fideism, indoctrination) (Kopnina, 2018; Van Dijk, 2015, etc.). The issues of mediating political interaction – building a certain information model of "media reality", which is understood to impose a set of "adequate" regime regulations and laws, norm practices, policy-making morals, image rules and "correct" ideological stereotypes (cf. the theory of "pseudo-environment", "post-truth", "cultivation", etc.), – deserve increased attention in this regard.

Thus, the purpose of the present research is to specify and describe the key manipulative tools with which to form a more friendly or aggressive tone of messages about Russia and determining its political place in the media of Iberoamerica. Of particular interest are the nuances of the interaction of linguistic and media mechanisms in modeling the current international image of Russia in the period of 2017-2019.

## 5. Research Methods

The manipulation phenomena and corresponding strategic features, effects and mechanisms, being successfully exposed and examined as one of the most specific mainstream scopes of academic and applied investigation paradigms, are also supposed to be studied depending on various particular value discourses of selected scientific interest. Consequently, for its complex, detailed and multi-faced understanding it is needed to introduce an interdisciplinary and multidimensional approach, which is focused on the reviewing content questions, as well as the context realization and pragmatic functioning of media communication tools. The appeal to the linguistic and extralinguistic context within the framework of this approach involves the use of methods of the linguistic analysis proper (structural-semantic, descriptive-analytical, methods of contextual and stylistic analysis), and the methods of related sciences (linguocognitive, linguopragmatic, linguocultural, linguopolitical etc.).

## 6. Findings

### Main Manipulative Techniques in Political Discourse

Among the most common manipulative technologies, the following are usually distinguished: selection and presentation of information, default, omission, filtering and re-emphasis (framing); mobilization (pumping / overload) and demobilization (mitigation / amortization); hoax and misinformation (falsification / distortion); defamation and self-justification; labeling and stereotyping; specification and generalization; intimization and dialogue; solidarity (integration) and agonism (opposition); the construction of deliberately unclear speech, the creation of information noise (entropy), as well as warspeak, doublespeak, langue de bois, post-truth, the phenomenon of "politainment", theatricality and creolization of political discourse, computational propaganda, etc. (Berrocal Gonzalo, 2017; Bradshaw & Howard, 2019; Charaudeau, 2016; Fuentes Rodríguez, 2016; Messina Fajardo, 2016; Navasartyan, 2017;

Sánchez García, 2009, etc.). The purpose of their use is the melioration or deterioration of a particular political image. Let us consider in more detail the implementation of the main linguistic-media mechanisms for building the Russia's "portrait" in the media political discourse of Iberoamerica.

### 6.1. Stylistic Techniques of Pressure

Under stylistic pressure we mean the accumulation of evaluative elements, the intensification of image attributes of both meliorative (+) and pejorative (-) orientation. Cf. the idea of a strong leader at the head of a strong country (+): el hombre fuerte de Rusia 'the strong man of Russia', aplastante victoria 'overwhelming victory', apoyo histórico / enorme / sincero 'historical / enormous, greatest / sincere support', el mejor Mundial de la historia 'he best World Cup in history', Rusia es un país espectacular 'Russia is a spectacular country', enorme / inmenso 'huge / enormous / inmense', hospitalario / acogedor 'hospitable / welcoming', adelantado 'advanced', poderoso y culto 'powerful and well-educated', eficaz y seguro 'effective and safe', amigable 'friendly', abierto 'open'; diferente 'different', diverso 'diverse', distinto 'distinct', otro 'other'; es un vasto territorio 'it is a vast territory', país-continente 'country-continent'; laudatory epithets featured in highlighting the present and historical past of Russia: brillante 'brillant', emblemático 'emblematic / iconic', enigmático 'enigmatic', espléndido 'splendid', excelente 'excellent', fabuloso 'fabulous', famoso 'famous', fantástico 'fantastic', fascinante 'fascinating', formidable 'formidable', bello 'beautiful', hermoso 'lovely', increíble 'incredible', impecable 'impeccable', imponente 'imposing', importante 'important', privilegiado 'privileged', maravilloso 'wonderful', moderno 'modern', nuevo 'new' (organization, services, communications, infrastructure, cities, monuments), etc. (Iakushkina, 2019a, 2019b).

Cf. "telling" headlines (-): Vladimir Putin, zar de Rusia 'Vladimir Putin, Tsar of Russia', Siempre Putin 'Always Putin / Putin forever', Los patriarcas del XXI 'The patriarchs of the XXI', Putin: "dictator perpetuus", as well as using the dialogue technique: Corre peligro la democracia? 'Is democracy in danger?', ¿Por qué Putin es una amenaza para Colombia? 'Why is Putin a threat to Colombia?', etc. The articles describe V. Putin, on the one hand, as zar contemporáneo 'contemporary tsar', dios 'god', emperador del orbe 'emperor of the world', "macho alfa" 'alpha male', restaurador de la gran Rusia 'restorer of great Russia', viejo espía levantisco en el poder supremo 'old and rebellious East spy in supreme power', Gran hermano 'Big brother', líder autoritario y mesiánico 'authoritarian and messianic leader', hombre fuerte y antiliberal 'strong and anti-liberal man', patriarca 'patriarch', dictador 'dictator', "el oso ruso" 'the Russian bear', on the other, as el verdadero / el primer ganador [del campeonato] 'the true / first winner [of the championship]', un líder culto, carismático, valiente 'an educated, charismatic, brave leader', un orgullo para el pueblo Ruso 'a pride for the Russian people', un personaje atípico, pero genial 'an atypical character, but great', etc.

### 6.2. Antithesis / Contrast Technique

Cf.: Este-Oeste, Kremlin-Putin-Rusia-Moscú vs Occidente, elecciones "transparentes" ("transparent" elections) vs miles de irregularidades ('thousands of irregularities'), Putin - Navalny. Often this technique takes the form of a litotes: manifestantes anti-Putin 'anti-Putin protesters', la protesta antigubernamental 'the anti-government protest', país no democrático 'undemocratic country',

antidemocracia 'anti-democracy', eso no es democracia, es dictadura 'that is not democracy, it is dictatorship', elecciones "injustas" 'unfair elections' etc. The image of "brilliant" Russia (más allá de estos estereotipos / prejuicios / preconceptos / tópicos 'beyond these stereotypes / prejudices / preconceptions / topics') is contrasted with its "true" image (la auténtica Rusia; un país gélido, anacrónico, hostil y casi inexplorable 'the real Russia; a cold, anachronistic, hostile and almost unexplorable country'), while ratings of Russian problems are published (raising the retirement age, taxes, strikes / hunger strikes, terrorism, homophobia, racism, machismo, misogyny, sexual harassment, etc.). The features of Russian geopolitical dualism (Europe-Asia) are separately specified.

### 6.3. Comparison and Repetition Techniques

In image media texts about Russia, one can also observe the method of comparison (su mejor resultado electoral 'his best electoral result', el mayor apoyo 'the greatest support', el país más grande del mundo 'the largest country in the world') and repetition (reeligido / reelecto / reelección 'reelected / reelection', para un nuevo mandato 'for a new term'). Cf. drawing analogies with previous electoral situations (2012, 2004), as well as with other great empires and their rulers (Alejandro, César, Carlomagno, Napoleón, Hitler); allusions to previous historical events (political "centenarians" of the Soviet era: Lenin, Stalin, Kruschev, etc.).

### 6.4. Concretization Technique

Specification / detailing should include handling statistical data (total number of voters, voting data in Crimea, percentage of youth participating in the elections, number of countries participating in the World Cup, football results, achievement and anti-achievement ratings, biography data, etc.), factual information, information about the territorial scale of the country (Moscú, San Petersburgo, Kaliningrado, Kamtchatka, Krasnoyarsk, Nizhni Nóvgorod, Rostov del Don, Samara, Saransk, Sochi, Yakutsk; la histórica Ekaterimburgo 'the historic Yekaterinburg', la tártara Kazán 'the Tatar Kazan', la heróica Volgogrado 'the heroic Volgograd', etc.), as well as the mention of places of events (la plaza Bolotnaia 'Bolotnaia Square', el / la Duma, el famoso Kremlin 'the famous Kremlin', el estadio Luzhniki 'Luzhniki Stadium', en la plaza del Manezh 'on Manezh Square', a orillas del río Nevá 'on the banks of the Neva River', el Gran Palacio 'the Grand Palace', el Teatro Bolshoi 'the Bolshoi Theater', etc.). The use of image-forming onyms (toponyms, anthroponyms), "keywords of the current moment", which contribute to the formation of the corresponding "portrait" of the country, is especially noted. These are both topical issues of foreign and domestic policy (la anexión de Crimea 'the annexation of Crimea', la crisis Siria 'the Syrian crisis', el caso Skrypal 'the Skrypal case'; Pável Grudinin, el patriarca Kiril, Dmitri Medvédev, Dmitri Peskov, Ksenia Sobchak, etc.), and realities that "refer" to the historical past of Russia (la revolución rusa de 1905, la Bolchevique de 1917, URSS, Anatoli Sobchak, Boris Yeltsin, la Perestroika, Gulag, KGB / FSB, Guerra Fría 'Cold War'). The systematic replication and distribution of stable ideas and changeless images as well as the mythologization of similar prejudices are considered as the main point of the "labeling" tactic. However, the Western media do not re-evaluate realities, they operate on established assessments of the socio-political mainstream, clearly defining the "mythology" inherent in an authoritarian regime (Chudinov, 2010, p. 38).

### 6.5. Creolization and Theatricalization Techniques

One cannot fail to mention such features of the political representation of Russia and President V. Putin as theatricality and creolization, which are often mutually reinforcing (the phenomenon of "politainment"). According to the famous media communication postulate of McLuhan "The medium is the mA/Essage", it is expected that the most impactful manipulation is used to be realized in the context of multicode or "visual" ("creolized") publications composed of various non-verbal content elements – pictures, photos, caricatures, memes, video, audio, typography and design features, etc., contributing to the creation of subliminal effects. Moreover, due to the tactics of selection and framing, the verbal part can often be interpreted in different ways (contrast, antiphrasis). As one of the possible results is the re-evaluation of the "positive" image of a "great country" and its "long(all)-time" leader (cf. presidential elections victory vs opposition protests and ordinary public characters; official photos vs caricatures).

The theatricality of the Russia's image mediapolitical representation is also revealed by operating "theatrical" allusions, references and simulacrum (cf. spectacularity of political events and ceremonies; political actors playing in public performances, trying to entertain the audience and involve it into the stage game, etc.), as well as "theatrical" wording (espectáculo 'show', la inauguración espectacular [de la Copa del Mundo] 'the spectacular opening [of the World Cup]', la transmisión de la ceremonia con un toque teatral 'the transmission of the ceremony with a theatrical touch', una dictadura enmascarada 'a masked dictatorship', etc.). Of particular interest is the "theatrical" manifestation of the solidarity technique, which is labelled by using the integrative potential of the pronouns "we-you-our/s-your/s, me-everyone-together" (a politician being associated with the nation): "¡Nos espera un glorioso futuro!", expresó Putin ante multitudes que lo aclamaban y coreaban "¡Rusia! ¡Rusia!" (Iakushkina, 2019a, p. 248), "A glorious future awaits us!" Putin said to crowds cheering and chanting "Russia! Russia!" (associations with monarchical worship).

### 6.6. Techniques of Warspeak + Doublespeak

In the image media texts devoted to Russia, the familiar combination of militarist and demagogic rhetoric (warspeak + doublespeak) is constantly noted. Cf.: gastos militares 'military expenditure', carrera armamentista 'arms race', defensa nacional 'national defense', la anexión / conquista de nuevos territorios 'the annexation / conquest of new territories', el belicoso erotismo de Vladimir Putin 'the bellicose eroticism of Vladimir Putin', declaraciones marciales 'martial statements', arreglar las situaciones conflictivas por medios políticos y diplomáticos 'resolve conflict situations by political and diplomatic means', luchar por garantizar sus intereses nacionales 'fight to guarantee their own national interests', etc. The repetition of stable clichés (cf. Orwell's duckspeak; langue de bois, 'wooden language') is an effective tool for instilling appropriate images and stereotypes (suggestion).

### 6.7. "Cut" Technique

Finally, it should be noted that the same excerpts from a report, speech or interview of the president can be distributed in the media content in such a way that the tonality of the message will be either positive or negative (quote fragmentation / selective citation, "cut" method, "posttruth" ideology). Depending on the chosen media strategy, the Russian president appears not only on the list of the most popular politicians

of the world ("10 personajes del mundo", etc.), but also on the rating of world leaders who have established themselves as political aggressors and abusers ("villanos del mundo" 'villains of the world').

## 7.    Conclusion

Thus, in the media of Iberoamerica one can find both neutral in tone media texts and analytical publications with pronounced evaluative connotations of an ambivalent nature, contributing to the formation of a more attractive or repulsive image of the country. Beyond that, the ambiguous and "janus faced" nature of the multi-vector Russia's image presentation can be highlighted as part of the same mediapolitical context. The selection, combination and framing of the love-hate (nuanced, critical, provocative, shady, tricky, debatable, confusing, etc.) manipulative mechanisms, being simultaneously applied, emphasizes the specific aspects of the "Russian theme" implementation on the national and global scale, as well as its understanding strategies in the modern linguopolitical reality. All this, in our opinion, allows us to assert that there is not so much an "aggressiveness / friendliness index" as an "indicator of interest".

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