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Ecological reflection and its verbalization in the Russian, English and French media discourse space: a comparative approach

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Abstract. The article covers the problem of ecological reflection and the ways of its linguistic realization in the Russian and foreign media discourse space at the present epoch of digitalization and sustainable development. The main goal of this research is to characterize the key linguistic ways of expressing ecological reflection at its individual and collective levels of information perception by human consciousness in Russian, English and French media discourses. The study contains a comparative approach towards the analysis of the language units that express ecological reflection in the media discourses of different language domains. This method helps define the relevance of the study, which is primarily explained by the increasing number of interactive media materials focused on the environmental issues of the third millennium. The results of the study demonstrate a different degree of the language expression of ecological reflection (evolutionary, mediative and radical) by means of a particular choice of linguistic instruments specific for a certain language media space. In the end, one common principle is identified in the expression of ecological reflection in the Russian, French and English media discourse space. Despite almost opposite linguistic approaches towards the implementation of ecological reflection in the Russian, English and French media, there is one common challenge that unites them all, and this is the survival of the planet as well as its further sustainable development. Thus, at this stage the language choice for the promotion

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of eco-reflective ideas becomes convergent for three media discourse space of Russia, France and the English-speaking world.

Keywords: ecological reflection, media discourse space, Russia, English-speaking world, France, media effects, verbalization, evolutionary, mediative, radical

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Экологическая рефлексия и ее вербализация в российском, англоязычном и французском медиадискурсивном пространстве: сопоставительный аспект

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Аннотация. Рассматривается проблема экологической рефлексии и способы ее языковой реализации в российском и зарубежном медиадискурсивном пространстве в современную эпоху цифровизации и устойчивого развития. Основная цель научного исследования – охарактеризовать ключевые лингвистические способы выражения экологической рефлексии на ее индивидуальном и коллективном уровнях восприятия информации сознанием человека в российском, англоязычном и французском медиадискурсах. Исследование содержит сопоставительный подход к анализу языковых единиц, выражающих экологическую рефлексия в медиадискурсивном пространстве трех различных языковых доминионов. Данный метод позволяет определить актуальность исследования, выражающуюся, прежде всего, в постоянном увеличении объема медиаматериала, посвященного экологическим проблемам XXI столетия. Результаты исследования дают возможность оценить различную степень эмоциональной и интеллектуальной выраженности экологической рефлексии на языковом уровне ее восприятия (эволюционной, опосредованной и радикальной) в медиадискурсивном пространстве российских, англоязычных и французских СМИ. Кроме того, по результатам анализа практического материала исследования выделен общий принцип репрезентации экологической рефлексии в трех различных языковых медиадискурсивных пространствах России, Франции и стран англоязычного международного альянса. Вопреки практически противоположному лингвистическому подходу к языковой имплементации экологической рефлексии в российских, англоязычных и французских СМИ, существует единая задача, объединяющая все три международных медиадискурсивных пространства, которая заключается в выживании современной планеты и ее дальнейшем устойчивом развитии. Таким

образом, на данном этапе реализации цели по устойчивому развитию Земли в третьем тысячелетии выбор языковых средств на индивидуальном и коллективном уровнях рефлексивного восприятия разнообразных экологических идей становится конвергентным для всех трех медиадискурсивных пространств России, Франции и всего англоязычного мира.

Ключевые слова: экологическая рефлексия, медиадискурсивное пространство, Россия, англоязычный мир, Франция, медиаэффекты, вербализация, эволюционный, опосредованный, радикальный

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Introduction

In recent decades more and more people across the globe are getting integrated into environmental activities due to the spread of Internet technologies and the popularity rise of new means of media communication. The creation of the Media Ecology Association in 1998 [1] on the North American continent contributed to the spread of the corresponding philosophical ideas aimed at understanding the relationships between such concepts as environments, media, human beings and interactions [ibid.]. Such an approach that suggested “the study of media as environments” [2] developed an ecological metaphor in diverse media texts and circumstances and regarded a technological change as primarily an ecological one [3]. The same approach has also helped people understand the concept that “a new medium does not add something; but it changes everything” [ibid.] including a person’s perception of the current global ecological challenges as well as their own roles in the system of sustainable development goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015.

Thus, **the main goal of this research** is to introduce the concept of ecological reflection through its correlation with the media discourse environment and analyze its ways of verbalization and media effects in different language cultures based on a comparative case study of the Russian, English and French societies.

This research comprises three major parts: first, we focus on the definition of ecological reflection and investigate its transforming role in the present-day global digital civilization. Second, we demonstrate how and why this concept is being actively verbalized in the media discourse space and what a psycholinguistic effect it can contribute to the modern society. Third and finally, we analyze the similarities and differences of the language implementation of ecological reflection in various national domains and summarize the main linguistic trends in its presentation at a contemporary digital age.

Methods and materials

The implementation of the research goal and tasks becomes possible due to the following complementary research methods: theoretical analysis of scientific literature on the presented problem, descriptive and comparative methods, statistical data processing and, finally, content and discourse analyses to uncover the key trends and patterns of ecological reflection verbalization in the media discourse space of Russia, English and French media worlds.

The materials of this work became the discourses of the leading Russian media editions (Vzglyad (“Delovaya Gazeta Vzglyad”), Vedomosti, Kommersant, Argumenty i Fakty, Lenta.ru, Komsomolskaya Pravda), media platforms (Rutube.com; Smotrim.ru, Vesti.ru), social media (VKontakte); English media editions (The Guardian, USA Today, The Washington Post, The Independent, The New York Times, The Sydney Morning Herald, Los Angeles Times, Toronto Star, The Irish Times, The Economist); English-language social media (Twitter) as well as a video hosting (YouTube); French media editions (Le Monde, Le Figaro, Le Parisien), a media platform France 24. The overall number of the analyzed printed characters dedicated to the problem of the linguistic implementation of ecological reflection is 400 000 while the total number of videos watched is 100 hours.

Ecological reflection in the global digital media environment of the XXIst century

Ecological reflection has become a cutting edge social phenomenon which is actively speculated in the first quarter of the third millennium. Reflection (or self-reflection, self-observation, reflective awareness and consciousness) is an individual’s ability to witness and evaluate his or her own cognitive, emotional, and behavioural processes [4; 5]. When we define ecological reflection, we mean the ability of a human being to understand their role in the construction of the sustainable environment on the internal and external levels of their interaction with the outer world. In recent decades people have started more and more frequently reflect on the number of ecological issues which appear and happen on the “blue” planet in the XXIst century. The notoriously discussed topics of climate change and global warming, maintaining biodiversity, deforestation, air, soil, and water pollution [6] are on the permanent agenda in the present-day global new media environment. The modernization of digital technologies goes hand in hand with the ecological modernization processes which have become “an effective ecological response to a variety of circumstances or imperatives regarding social-ecological thought” [7] since the beginning of the late 1970s, when a lot of various environmental movements appeared in different parts of the civilized world propagating the review of people’s attitude towards the exploitation of Nature. The current technological features of new media (e.g. online video sharing and social media platforms, digital TV and podcasts, online blogging and commenting) allow discovering, discussing and reflecting on the crucial challenges of environmental changes and thus developing adequate solutions to them.

It is important to mention that ecological reflection can be both collective and individual, depending on whether it represents a certain group's idea or a personal ecological worldview. A good example of a collective ecological reflection can be seen in the British media edition «The Economist», whose mission is to provide credible reflections or thoughts on the most «dramatic» environmental dilemmas of our century (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. An example of a collective ecological reflection based on the reports presented in the British media edition «The Economist». Available from: www.economist.com

The choice of words introduced in the lead (*a collective human endeavour, our journalists assess*) underline the importance of a collective exchange of environmental ideas and building group eco-consciousness so as «to meet the historic goals» of a more sustainable future.

One of the best examples of an individual ecological reflection is demonstrated in the Russian media edition “Vedomosti. Ecology” where the deputy general director of the Pipe Metallurgical Company (TMK) Vladimir Oborsky reflects on the principle of eco-volunteering in Russia. From his viewpoint, “Эковолонтерство – это внутренняя потребность человека, который борется за окружающую среду там, где проживает” [8]. (Eco-volunteering is an *internal human need*, who fights for the environment where he or she lives.)

Thus, we may see the linguistic opposition between a collective human endeavour and internal human need that define the understanding of the ecological reflection on both levels of consciousness – an individual and a group one.

The correlation between the language and human consciousness, their unity [9] constitute the basement for controlling human behaviour, knowing oneself and the existence of the external culture. They also help form the symbolic reality which constitutes the existence of a language [ibid.].

Therefore, analyzing the modern ecological reality by means of words in different languages and their inclusion in the world of media symbols which dominate at the present epoch, a much stronger image of ecological reflection can be perceived and better understanding of the evolution of the human ecological consciousness may be provided for the further scientific analysis.

Verbalization of ecological reflection through the media discourse space

The possibility of linguistic explication of ecological reflection draws a line between the human subconscious and consciousness which directly relate this problem to the process of speech generation and also becomes relevant in the framework of this research.

A Soviet psychologist L.S. Vygotsky singled out three stages that are responsible for generating a certain speech act: a motivation phase, internal verbalization (which marks the beginning of the verbal thinking stage) and finally its implementation in tangible external words [10]. The last stage is characterized by a deliberate selection of language tools necessary to express the speaker's thoughts. Deliberateness implies the presence of the goal of the action in the individual's mind, which is subject to the choice of each component of the statement – words, grammatical constructions, intonation and graphic means [11]. A person reflects about how the form of his or her speech message will contribute to the achievement of the introduced communication goals and produces conscious mental efforts [12] so as to reach those objectives. Thus, we may see that internal communicative factors interact with external ones [13].

At the current era external factors can be “understood as conditions that facilitate the emergence of one or another internal regularity of the language” [14]. In other words, social and technological conditions define the reflective mechanism of the language. Taking into account the transformation of the environmental policy in the present-day global society due to recent ecological challenges that Earth is facing today, we may suggest that this external factor impacts on the language and human ecological consciousness. Moreover, these linguistic changes affect directly human reflection on a verbalized level of its environmental functioning. In the paragraph below, we are going to introduce definite examples of the linguistic forms of ecological reflection and demonstrate its functioning in three different languages: Russian, English and French.

Language interpretation of ecological reflection in the Russian, English and French media discourse space: similarities and differences

The former first lady of the USA Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis once mentioned that “all the changes in the world, for good or evil, were first brought about *by words*” [15]. Understanding Nature and putting efforts to preserve it, starts with an individual's self-reflection focused on the environmental issues that are embodied in a specific set of language (lexical and grammar) structures. Depending on the

structure of the language itself, those sets will vary and hence the perception of the outer world with all the ecological challenges in it.

Table 1 below demonstrates three comparison groups of a key vocabulary extracted by means of the discourse and content analyses that deal with the examples of ecological reflection in the Russian, French and English media discourse space. We will take a closer look at their interpretation.

Table 1

Ecological reflection in key terms expressed in the Russian, English-language and French media discourse space

Media discourse	Key vocabulary
Russian	человек (Man), природа (nature), сознание (consciousness), антропоцентризм (anthropocentrism); нерушимая взаимосвязь (unbreakable interconnection), постоянное взаимодействие (constant interaction); наш общий дом (our common home); дальнейшее развитие нашего общества (further development of our society); противоречия (contradictions); человечество на грани экологической катастрофы (Humanity is on the verge of an ecological catastrophe); эволюция на протяжении всей нашей истории (evolution throughout our history); язык (language)
French	une politique ambitieuse de préservation de l'environnement (an ambitious environmental policy); une coalition (a coalition); une terre de conflits (a land of conflict); le combat (the combat); la catastrophe climatique (the climate disaster); l'affaire du siècle (the case of the century); le grand combat d'aujourd'hui (the great battle of today); un affect écologique universel (a universal ecological affect)
English	eco-warriors; a warlike culture; climate hawks; to adopt a wartime mentality; to stand in the way of victory; to fight climate change; a battle between rivals; The enemy is coming. The Climate mobilization; climate emergency; climate catastrophe; an us-versus-them narrative; severe devastation and suffering

A comparative and contrastive analysis of the similarities and differences between dominant Russian, English and French lexical units that stand behind ecological reflection and are actively functioning in the media discourse space prove that the problem of the protection and preservation of the ecological heritage on the planet is a contemporary global agenda for the whole humanity in the XXIst century. This is proved by the frequent usage of the word «catastrophe» in such collocations as Russian «экологическая» (ecological) as well as French «climatique» and English «climatic, climate» (экологическая катастрофа; la catastrophe climatique; climate catastrophe).

e.g. «*We can still avert catastrophe, but there is only a narrow window left to end the era of fossil fuels*» [16].

Almost the same idea but less radical can be found in the Russian and French media discourse space correspondingly.

e.g. «Судьба дальнейшего развития человечества зависит от того, насколько быстро будут найдены пути разрешения противоречий между ограниченными возможностями нашей биосферы и агрессивным по отношению к ней типом развития общества» [17]. (The fate of the mankind's further development depends on how quickly we will find the way to resolve the

contradictions between the limited capacities of our biosphere and the aggressive type of social development dominating today.)

e.g. «Cette Nature, qui était auparavant omniprésente, universellement et immédiatement accessible, devient *un produit de luxe*» [18]. (This Nature, which was previously omnipresent, universally and immediately accessible, becomes a luxury product.)

Quite an unusual metaphorical comparison with the world of exclusivity and privilege is presented in the French media discourse. The reflections on Nature, from the viewpoint of the collective author, demonstrate a change in its perception: from something omnipresent that modern society used to take for granted to the precious substance which is in deficit at present.

Despite the similar view of three different media discourse space on the catastrophic sequences of human activity towards the environment, we may clearly understand the distinction between the degree of emotional, intellectual and pragmatic inclusion of the reflective mechanism into the environmental problem solution, both individually and collectively in the Russian, English and French media domains.

Figure 2 below presents the level of change of ecological perception of the environmental issues in three different media languages.



Figure 2. A change in individual and collective ecological reflection represented in the Russian, French and English media discourse space:

RMD – Russian media discourse; FMD – French media discourse; EMD – English media discourse

The linguistic analysis of the ecological reflection represented on the Russian, French and English media platforms demonstrated a gradual change of the perception of ecology and environmental challenges as well as their problem-solving mechanisms from the evolutionary one (in the Russian media discourse) to moderately radical and mediative (in the French media discourse) and up to absolutely radical in the English language media discourse.

The key reflective idea that circulates in the Russian media discourse space is focused on the ecological changes in the human mind which allow people to perceive the environment not from the consumer's point of view, but as a grateful partner.

e.g. «Спасение природы — дело рук неравнодушных» [17]. («Saving Nature is the work of those who are passionate about Her».)

e.g. «Каждый из жителей планеты должен понять, что и он в ответе за те экологические проблемы, с которыми столкнулось человечество. Если не предпринимать никаких мер, то «венец природы» скоро сам окажется на

границ исчезновения» [ibid.]. («Each inhabitant of the planet must understand that they are also responsible for the environmental problems that humanity has faced. If no measures are taken, then the civilization will soon be on the verge of extinction»¹).

According to the reflective thoughts of the French media, the human civilization may face the extinction if no «environmental» coalition between countries is built today. At the same time, they are focusing on such key lexemes as *protectionnisme* (protectionism), *patriotisme économique* (economic patriotism), *frontiers* (national borders), *réindustrialisation* (reindustrialisation) and *démondialisation* (deglobalization).

e.g. «Sans protectionnisme, l'écologie est *un vain mot*, qui ne peut que nuire à notre économie et à nos emplois»². (Without protectionism, ecology is *an empty word*, which can only harm our economy and jobs.)

Thus, to make the «green» word sound sensible, one should balance between globalized and localized environmental worlds which eliminate political contradictions so as to reach a common sustainable goal in the end.

Contradictions (which can be natural as well as man-made) usually produce “a battle or a game in which winning or losing is the main concern”³. Fighting for a sustainable future of the planet and against the climate change becomes the main message introduced in the present-day English media discourse space. The key linguistic terms which are introduced in the English media today focus on the military sphere. «*War shapes our words*» [ibid.].

A Canadian journalist for the media edition «Toronto star» Melissa Gismondi is reflecting on the destruction effect of the First World War on the environment by reviewing a movie «1917» directed by a British film and stage director, producer, and screenwriter Sam Mendes. She mentions that «watching the movie I was struck by not just the horror of war, but the *horror war* does to the *environment*. «1917» is yet another reminder of everything *war destroys*»⁴. Meanwhile, one should mention that her future forecast sounds more or less optimistic as M. Gismondi highlights the idea of the environmental persistence.

e.g. «*Plant life* did what it does best in the face of destruction: *persist*. <...> In the midst of one of the *most brutal wars* the world has ever seen, Blake turns to the

¹ Bonnamy J.-L. L'écologie politique conduit à une catastrophe environnementale. *Le Figaro*. le 05 février, 2021. Available from: <https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/societe/l-ecologie-politique-conduit-a-une-catastrophe-environnementale-20210205>. Accessed: July 15, 2022.

² Truong N. L'écologie, une terre de conflits. *Le Monde*. le 03 juin 2022. Available from: https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2022/06/03/l-ecologie-une-terre-de-conflits_6128765_3232.html. Accessed: July 13, 2022.

³ Yoder K. To take on climate change, we need to change our vocabulary. *The Guardian*. December 16, 2018. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/dec/15/to-take-on-climate-change-we-need-to-change-our-vocabulary>. Accessed: July 17, 2022.

⁴ Gismondi M.J. Film '1917' shows the environmental cost of war. *Toronto star*. February 7, 2020. Available from: <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2020/02/07/film-1917-shows-the-environmental-cost-of-war.html>. Accessed: July 16, 2022.

environment for hope. He's confident that despite what human beings do, *flowers will bloom, trees will grow*. In the midst of our current climate crisis, this is a *hopeful message* but it feels like a naive one, too» [ibid.].

Thus, it is evident that there are different attitudes towards the environmental protection on the planet and various linguistic types of expression of the ecological reflection (basically on a semantic level of its realization) in three different media discourse space: in the Russian, French and English media worlds. At the same time one thing unites them all, and this is the idealized faith in the human solidarity which can become an effective instrument for the sustainable development of modern civilization.

e.g. «The «2030 Agenda» for sustainable development was signed <...> and includes a commitment *to end* global hunger, *fight* inequalities and *tackle* climate change – it also contained a "Leave No One Behind" promise»⁵.

e.g. «<...> люди уникальны. <...> сам человек является активной частью экосистемы, без влияния которой экосистема не будет развиваться гармонично. Человечество <...> должно разработать <...> модели мира, где локальные процессы и процессы масштаба, в которых со средой взаимодействуют конкретные физические и юридические лица, взаимосвязаны с глобальными процессами. Только так можно понять, что необходимо делать для устойчивого развития мира»⁶. (<...> people are unique. <...> man himself is an active part of the ecosystem. Without its influence human beings will not develop in harmony. Humanity <...> must develop <...> the world models, where local processes, in which specific individuals and legal entities interact with the environment, are interconnected with global processes. This is the only way to understand what needs to be done for the sustainable development of the planet.)

e.g. «*Ne laisser personne derrière*». Ce principe *est essentiel* dans un monde contemporain habité par de plus en plus de conflits, de radicalisation et d'émergence d'extrémismes dans nos sociétés. Ces objectifs nous *donnent une langue commune et des principes*».⁷ («Leave no one behind». This principle is essential in a contemporary world inhabited by more and more conflicts, radicalization and the emergence of extremism in our societies. These goals give us a common language and principles.)

Therefore, we may see quite a careful choice of extremely dynamic verbs and verbal collocations (to end, to fight, to tackle; быть уникальным (to be unique),

⁵ O'Sullivan K. Concerning lack of progress' on sustainable development in Ireland. The Irish Times. November 21, 2018. Available from: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/concerning-lack-of-progress-on-sustainable-development-in-ireland-1.3706168>. Accessed: July 10, 2022.

⁶ Stepanov O. "Sustainable development" will lead to the creation of a socialist concentration camp. Vzglyad. February 9, 2022. Available from: <https://vz.ru/opinions/2022/2/9/1141270.html>. Accessed: July 12, 2022. (In Russ.).

⁷ Barroux R. Développement durable: «Nous avons encore le choix de changer la trajectoire». Le Monde. le 16 juillet, 2018. Available from: https://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2018/07/16/developpement-durable-nous-avons-encore-le-choix-de-changer-la-trajectoire-pour-les-cinq-cents-prochaines-annees_5332037_3244.html. Accessed: July 13, 2022.

взаимодействовать (to interact), должно разработать (must develop); ne laisser personne (leave no one behind), donnent une langue commune et des principes (to give a common language and principles)) in the Russian, English and French media discourses. No doubt, they help reflect properly on a global sustainable development and prove the necessity of energetic actions so as to reconstruct the world civilization model in an eco-friendlier way.

Conclusion

Ecological reflection has become a crucial social experience of the first half of the XXIst century. It is being triggered and promoted in the global media discourse space due to a lot of environmental challenges recently occurred in the world. A linguistic content and discourse analysis have demonstrated the presence of three key domains of the language interpretation of this strategically important psychological phenomenon: evolutionary, politically moderate and mediative and finally radical ones. The thorough study of the semantic units and structures often used in the Russian, English and French media discourses showed the circulation of specific terms that denote natural, political and military reflective approaches towards the discussion of multiple environmental problems at the present moment.

One can face the most nature-oriented attitude towards the environment in the Russian media discourse space and the most military image of the ecological problem-solving mechanism in the English media domain. The presentation of environmental ideas in the modern French media discourse introduces more national dilemmas that the French politicians must deal with in case they want to build a much greener West European country on the European continent.

Nevertheless, taking into account the unique international policy of sustainable development adopted by the United Nations in 2015 and being popularized across the planet, one should highlight a common linguistic attitude towards the language interpretation of the ecological future of the globe. The reflective mechanism of environmental development is characterized by a variety of dynamic verbal collocations that create a constructive image of sustainability no matter what media language is being implemented. Such a linguistic approach towards the ecological reflection and its inclusion in the media discourse space brings hope that despite different language choice of ecological expression, the humanity will manage to build a common environmental language that will overcome social and political obstacles and construct a stable, green future.

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