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THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP IN SOVIET, FRENCH, ITALIAN MEDIA DISCOURSES IN 1939-1945

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Abstract

This article is an interim result of the study carried out by a team of scientists from SUSU under the grant of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research “The Ural Region in Media Discourse of the Great Patriotic War (Based on the Material of Digitized Archival Documents of Russia and Western Europe)”. One of the key issues considered in the study of media discourse of the Great Patriotic War is the Soviet leadership image. The article will consider peculiar features of representing the image of the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and his closest associates in the digitized texts about the Urals published in periodicals of the USSR, France and Italy in 1939-1945. The inconsistency of the image of the Soviet leadership and the ambiguity in evaluating its actions of organizing battles at the front and work in the Ural rear represented in the domestic and foreign wartime press are primarily preconditioned by the political regime, the ideological situation and the role of the USSR, its ally France and pro-fascist Italy in the Great Patriotic War / World War II. The analysis of the material of the studied period is interdisciplinary in nature, since it is based on the use of the data of history and culturology. The paper uses the method of discourse analysis, comparative method and linguocultural analysis.

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Keywords: Media discourse, digitized archives, Great Patriotic War, World War II, Joseph Stalin, the Urals.



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1. Introduction

The socio-economic development of the society, as well as the very essence of scientific knowledge, determines the interdisciplinary nature of modern science. Pages of magazines actively discuss the use of mixed methods in research and development of an interdisciplinary research methodology (Fetters & Molina-Azorin, 2017; Tobi & Kampen, 2018).

A vivid implementation of the interdisciplinary approach in scientific research is discourse, a field of knowledge studying the unity of the text and the communicative situation. The authors deal with the problems of a critical analysis of discourse (Van Dijk, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2009), semiotic characteristics of certain types of discourse (Sheygal, 2004), and hybrid discourse formats (Solopova & Naumova, 2018). Diachronic and retrospective studies are carried out in the field of political metaphorology (Solopova & Chudinov, 2018; Solopova, 2019); there are also works on the study of digitized archives as sources of material within the framework of the media (military-publicistic) discourse research (Solopova, Saltykova, & Voroshilova, 2018).

The study of discourse, involving the interpretation of speech materials, is impossible if the historical context is ignored. Speaking about the purpose of history, Jaspers (1991) notes: "... as the past, it [history] is an infinite world of semantic relations open to interpretation..." (p. 269). A similar vision of the purpose of history is demonstrated very clearly in the studies of media discourse.

Media discourse, like any kind of discourse, has a lingo-cultural component, i.e., a correlation of language forms and their mental representations in the context of a particular culture. Boldyrev (2007), Boldyrev and Dubrovskaya (2016) mention in their works the importance of carrying out a culturological analysis of a language and the sociocultural specifics of discourse.

Besides, media discourse has great methodological potential at foreign language lessons (Bernat, Chernysheva, Shatrovich, Raevskaya, & Kozlova, 2019; Chernysheva, Bernat, Raevskaya, & Shatrovich, 2019).

2. Problem Statement

The modern world seeks to reconsider many historical facts. This is a natural trend preconditioned by the variability of the geopolitical situation, the change of generations, the appearance of new historical facts and their interpretation from different standpoints. Therefore, this research is an attempt to update our understanding of the role of the Soviet leadership in 1939-1945 through the study of media discourse of the USSR, France, and Italy of the indicated period.

The work with the digitized archives of 1930-1940 is an essential stage in the formation of our understanding of the events of World War II / Great Patriotic War since press archives objectively reflect the reality of that time, allowing us to carry out further reliable interdisciplinary retrospective studies.

It is the first time when a comparative study of media discourse of the Great Patriotic War / World War II is based on the material of three discourses. Such an approach allows us to conduct a comprehensive critical analysis of speech materials.

Publicistic texts of 1939-1945 dealing with the Ural industrial rear, the role of the Soviet leadership in its building and ensuring the victory of the Red Army contain a lingo-cultural component reflected in conceptual domains of the language. These domains should be identified and analyzed.

3. Research Questions

The study of Soviet (Russian), French, Italian digitized publicistic texts about the Ural region in 1939-1945 involves pursuing answers to the following questions:

1. How is the Soviet leadership represented in the publicistic texts of the USSR, France, and Italy in 1939-1945? What are the general and specific features of the studied discourses?
2. What is the lingo-cultural component of the texts about the Ural region in media discourse of the USSR, France, and Italy of the studied period, describing the actions of Joseph Stalin and his close associates in the organization of battles at the front and works in the Ural rear?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to conduct a comparative analysis of Soviet, French, and Italian media discourses in 1939-1945, describe the pragmatic potential of the texts about the Ural region, identify conceptual areas in the language of Russian, French, and Italian military journalism, and determine ways to represent the image of the Soviet leadership in the national and foreign press.

5. Research Methods

The comparative method used in the study involves the identification of general and specific characteristics of Soviet, French, and Italian media discourses in 1939-1945; it allows us to compare the image of the Soviet leadership represented in the discourses under study.

The method of discourse analysis allows us to determine the pragmatic potential of the texts about the Ural region in media discourse of the USSR, France, and Italy of the studied period.

The work also uses the linguo-cultural analysis to identify cultural conceptual areas in the language of Russian, French, and Italian military journalism and ways to represent them.

6. Findings

6.1. The image of the Soviet leadership in media discourse of the USSR in 1939-1945

The material used to study the Russian-language media discourse was the newspapers of Chelyabinsk Kirov Plant *Za Trudovyyu Doblest* (*For Zealous Labor*), *Nash Traktor* (*Our Tractor*) published in 1939-1945.

After Germany attacked the Soviet Union, the main goal of the Soviet media discourse was to clarify the situation to Soviet citizens in order to mobilize them to fight against the enemy. That is, the pragmatic function of the Soviet discourse is linked with the reflection of the communicative and cognitive attitudes of the participants in the communication process aimed at solving the set tasks.

The communicative attitudes of texts in 1939-1945 are focused on the maximum speech impact; therefore, the conceptual and sub-textual information is most important, in contrast to the factual information. In this connection, the most critical categorical property of the publicistic texts is the ability to form a new meaning of commonly used words; even everyday words and expressions reflected the ideological essence of the epoch: “The meaning of the concept of «ударник» (“shock-worker”) was absolutely clear in the context with the word “work” – “shock work” (Gridina, 2011, p. 25-29).

Besides, the attitude to the events described in the texts of the Russian-language media discourse of 1939-1945 is actualized by the semantic opposition “friend” – “foe”, which is reflected in the authors’ choice of lexical units of the thematic groups “allies” – “opponents”. At the same time, structurally different units are included in thematic groups. Thus, for example, in the text system of *Za trudovuyu doblest* periodical (1943), the thematic group “Allies” is represented by the following units: *товарищи* (*comrades*), *братья и сестры* (*brothers and sisters*), *большевистская партия* (*the Bolshevik Party*), *друзья-кировцы* (*Kirovets friends*), *стахановцы* (*Stakhanovites*), *трудсеники* (*workers*), *патриоты* (*patriots*), etc. The conceptual area of “alienness” represented by the thematic group “opponents,” includes such units: *гитлеровские мерзавцы* (*Hitler bastards*), *оккупанты* (*invaders*), *чёрные враги* (*black enemies*), *поджигатели* (*abettors*), *карлушики-колбасники* (*sausage Carles*), *обер-бандиты* (*Lord bandits*). Thus, the functional focus of the semantic opposition “friend” – “foe” in the texts of the Russian-language media discourse of 1939-1945 is determined by the main task of that time: over-mobilization in an extreme situation.

The ideological focus of the leadership’s actions was clearly expressed in the editorials of several newspaper issues, where the profiles of V.I. Lenin and I.V. Stalin were graphically depicted against the background of the Red Banner. Many of the leadership’s initiatives communicated to local teams are called *Сталинский фонд победы* (*the Stalin Victory Fund*), *Сталинское задание* (*Stalin’s Mission*).

The country’s leadership appealed directly to factory teams, and these appeals were supplemented, enriched and specified by the initiative of the factory workers:

Не раз коллектив нашего завода боевыми делами показывал свою беспредельную преданность советскому правительству, коммунистической партии и любимому вождю народов – товарищу Сталину [...]. Вперед, товарищи, к новым победам! (Наш Трактор, 8 марта 1942)

More than once, the workers of our plant demonstrated by our military affairs our infinite devotion to the Soviet government, the Communist Party and the beloved leader of the peoples – Comrade Stalin [...]. Move on, comrades, to new victories! (Nash Traktor, 1942)

The organizer and proponent of the party and government’s will in the Ural region was the Secretary of the Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) N.S. Patolichev. He supported and personally proposed several initiatives, which resulted in a mass movement – hourly competition, record-breaking workers, multi-tasking machine operators, front-line brigades, etc. Articles of 1942 are published under the title: “Стахановская фронтовая” (“Stakhanovite Frontline”), “Методы и приемы тысячников” (“Methods and Techniques of Record-Breaking Workers”), “Почасовой график – в действие!” (“Hourly Schedule – in force!”).

In 1942, the task of the State Defense Committee to organize mass production of the T-34 tank at the plant within one month was a real challenge for the workers. At the same time, it was necessary to

continue the production of the KV heavy tank, and to organize conveyor assembly and preparation of new thousands of parts and hundreds of components and their manufacture for the T-34 medium tank. This ambitious task was solved:

На призыв товарища Сталина работники советской промышленности ответили серьезным увеличением производства танков, противотанковых самолетов, противотанковых ракет и орудий и других противотанковых средств. (Наш Трактор, 11 мая 1942)

The workers of the Soviet industry came forward to Comrade Stalin's appeal with a considerable increase in the production of tanks, anti-tank aircraft, anti-tank rifles and guns, and other anti-tank weapons. (Nash Traktor, May 11, 1942)

In newspaper texts, the image of the Soviet leaders is represented by proper names: Secretary of the Regional Party Committee N.S. Patolichev, People's Commissar of the Heavy Industry V.A. Malyshev, Director of the plant and People's Commissar of the Tank Industry I.M. Zaltsman and others:

Народный Комиссар танковой промышленности, герой Социалистического труда, товарищ Зальцман перерезает ленточку финиша, и грозная машина, которой кировцы дали имя великого вождя Советского народа [...] Сталина, грозно рыча, вырывается с конвейера и уходит из цеха! (За трудовую доблесть, 24 августа 1942)

The People's Commissar of the Tank Industry, Hero of Socialist Labor, Comrade Zaltsman cuts the tape, and the formidable machine named by the Kirovets after the Great Leader of the Soviet people [...] Stalin, growls menacingly, escapes from the assembly line and leaves the workshop! (Za Trudovuyu Dobrelist, August 24, 1942)

Consequently, to support the fighting spirit of the Soviet people, the Russian-language texts of the studied period form the image of the Soviet leadership capable of making the right decisions for the speedy completion of hostilities. The epithet characterizing I.V. Stalin as the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the USSR is the adjective *великий* (great): *великий полководец* (great commander), *великий вождь* (great leader) (*Za Trudovuyu Dobrelist* newspaper, 1943), which combines the semes: "not like everyone else", "outstanding", "able to save", "worthy", "unique", "exceptional" in its concept, scope of meanings and associative semantic relations.

Strengthening of public compliance is another task which was accomplished through the media sources; therefore, the pragmatic attitude of appeals and slogans of those years is the maximum impact on the addressee: an appeal to all Soviet citizens to accomplish military and labor feats:

Больше оружия для армии освободителя! (More weapons for the liberator's army!)

Выполнить сталинское задание – твой патриотический долг!» (It is your patriotic duty to fulfill Stalin's mission!) (Za Trudovuyu Dobrelist, January – September 1943).

The pledge of the victory was a high competence of the Soviet leadership, the appropriate personnel policy at the local level, and self-sacrifice of people.

6.2. The image of the Soviet leadership in media discourse of France in 1939-1945

Let us turn to media discourse of France. The source material was the digitized archives of 1930-1940 freely available in the online library of Gallica National Library of France (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/html/und/presse-et-revues/presse-et-revues?mode=desktop>).

A few years before the outbreak of World War II, the French press paid close attention to the activities of the Soviet leadership and the Ural region. So, *L'Humanité* daily newspaper, the central organ of the French Communist Party, noted that back in 1929, the Soviet government passed a resolution to build a powerful tractor plant in the Urals. The coordination of the construction works was tasked to the People's Commissar of Military and Naval affairs Comrade Voroshilov (*camarade Voroschilov*), who later became the People's Commissar of Defense and one of the first Marshals of the Soviet Union.

The mood of the French articles about the Urals of the late 1930s-early 1940s is characterized by anxiety connected with the vulnerable positions of the USSR, including its possible defeat. The conceptual area of anxiety is represented by such units as *désorganisation* (*disorganization*), *une défaite* (*defeat*), *abandonnée à l'envahisseur* (*left to the enemy*), *détruire* (*destroy*), *un repli* (*retreat*), etc.

So, during the Soviet-Finnish war of 1939-1940, the industrial region experienced a significant shortage of food due to the problems with the railway communication between the cities of the eastern and western parts of the USSR. The difficulties with supplies resulted in the beginning of strikes at the factories in Tyumen, Sverdlovsk, Perm, etc. The Council of People's Commissars (the highest collegial body of the executive and administrative power of the USSR from 1923 to 1946) began to take immediate measures:

Le Conseil des commissaires du peuple a dû s'occuper de la question et Kaganovitch a reçu les instructions de rétablir, sous sa responsabilité personnelle, le ravitaillement normal de la région au plus tard le 10 janvier. (Paris-Soir, 28 décembre 1939)

The Council of People's Commissars was forced to address this issue, and Kaganovich was instructed to restore, under his personal responsibility, regular supplies to the region no later than January 10. (Paris-Soir, December 28, 1939)

The People's Commissar of Railways Lazar Kaganovich was a supporter of harsh actions. During the great terror of the 1930s, he signed hundreds of "execution" lists, lists of people repressed under the sanction of members of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks). At the same time, Kaganovich possessed an organizational talent and was able to carry out plans. So, the evacuation of enterprises to the rear, to the East, turned to be successful, and this was his merit.

The Soviet Union was not ready to restrain the onslaught of the enemy, and in the French press, the Urals began to be associated not only with the industrial rear but also with the possible place for evacuation of the Soviet government:

L'avance allemande vers Moscou et Kiev, l'appel de Staline invitant le peuple russe à tout détruire de ce qui peut servir à l'ennemi, diverses informations relatives à un repli prochain du gouvernement des Soviets à l'est de l'Oural, forment suffisamment d'éléments pour qu'on se demande ce que sera la deuxième phase de la campagne de Russie. (Le Journal, 7 juillet 1941)

The advance of the Germans to Moscow and Kiev, Stalin's appeal to the people to destroy everything that could be useful to the enemy, varying information related to the upcoming evacuation of

the Soviet government to the east of the Urals, cannot but raise a legitimate question concerning the second phase of the Russian military campaign. (Le Journal, July 7, 1941)

Nonetheless, competent strategic decisions of the Soviet leadership aimed at strengthening the industrial rear of the country made it possible to create a “new arsenal of the Red Army” (*le nouvel arsenal de l’armée rouge*) beyond the Ural mountain range, as described in an article on the Ural-Kuznetsk Combine published on April 9 1943 in *Je suis partout*. During the war years, a center of the national military industry was formed in the Urals, as French *Regards* editorial wrote in February 1945:

Les plans quinquennaux de Staline, avec leur sage prévision de l’avenir, ont contribué à le [le centre de gravité de l’industrie de guerre soviétique en Ukraine] déplacer vers l’intérieur du pays, afin de les mettre à l’abri des attaques aériennes et de stimuler le développement économique de l’U. R. S. S. (Regards, 1 février 1945)

Due to the foresight of Stalin’s five-year plans, it [the center of gravity of the Soviet military industry located in Ukraine] moved deeper into the country. This made it possible to protect the production rear from air attacks and stimulate the economic development of the USSR. (Regards, February 1, 1945)

The communicative-pragmatic attitudes of media discourse of France in the studied period are reflected in the lexical units conveying the addressee’s acting intent. An example of such a lexical unit is the adjective *sage* (*wise*) accompanying the lexical unit *prévision* (*forecast, foresight*). The lexical unit *sage* combines the semes: “smart”, “experienced”, “reasonable” (pertaining to decisions, actions). The Soviet leader is presented as a person able to predict the situation and make the right strategic decisions at critical moments.

An analysis of the material shows that in the French media discourse of 1939-1945, the leadership of the USSR is represented by the common lexical units *le gouvernement soviétique* (*Soviet government*), *le gouvernement des Soviets* (*government of the Soviets*), *Le Conseil des commissaires du peuple* (*Council of People’s Commissars*), and also with their own names: *Moscou* (*Moscow*), *Staline* (*Stalin*), *Voroschilov* (*Voroshilov*), *Kaganovitch* (*Kaganovich*).

Thus, the French publicistic texts about the Ural region in 1939-1945 exercise a predominantly informative function. Nevertheless, the image of the Soviet leadership created by the French print media reflects the allied position of France. French-language articles dealing with the Urals region present the Soviet leadership as decisive in taking tough measures, far-sighted and able to withstand the most difficult wartime challenges.

6.3. The image of the Soviet leadership in media discourse of Italy in 1939-1945

The material used to study Italian-language media discourse was the digitized archives of the Italian press freely available on the website of *La Stampa. Archivio storico* newspaper (<http://www.archiviolastampa.it/>). The study used the materials related to the first years of the war (1941-1942), which allowed us to identify a certain vision of historical events preconditioned by the political and ideological situation, which characterizes Italy in this period of history.

Italy characterized by a pro-fascist regime during World War II considered the Soviet people and the Soviet leadership not only from the standpoint of military-political, but also ideological opponents. To create a positive image of the fascist regime and, as its opposite, a negative image of the Soviet Union in the eyes of the Italian people, the Soviet government was shown weak and incapable of resistance. The keywords of the headings mentioning the Soviet leadership were “panic”, “desertion” and “retreat”: “*Stalin se ne andrà da Mosca fra i bagliori dell'incendio*” (“*Stalin escapes from Moscow in the midst of fires*”), “*Il governo sovietico lascerebbe Mosca*” (“*The Soviet government is likely to leave Moscow*”), “*Cosa farà adesso Stalin?*” (“*What will Stalin do now?*”). The headings of articles aimed to draw the reader’s attention to their information already contain a vision of the Soviet leadership’s fear of the inexorable German attacks.

The inability of Stalin and his associates to oppose Hitler’s troops is also verbalized in the lexical units of the conceptual area of “defeat” – *losses, despair, desertion*, which demonstrates the political and military pressure on the enemy:

Sotto la pressione dell'avanzata germanica Il governo sovietico lascerebbe Mosca. Si parla di un trasferimento negli Urali. Stalin riconosce in un discorso affo rodio fo gravità della sconfitto subita e lancia un disperato appello offe popolazioni sovietiche... (3 luglio 1941)

Under the pressure from the German attack, the Soviet government is likely to leave Moscow. They say about moving towards the Urals. Stalin recognizes the seriousness of the defeat in conversations with his close associates and appeals to the Soviet population... (July 3, 1941)

When analyzing the Italian-language texts of media discourse of the Great Patriotic War / World War II, special attention is drawn to the lexical unit “red”, which is applied to the Soviet leadership and I.V. Stalin in particular. The metaphorical transfer of “red” in the meaning of “communist” does not only emphasize the political and military confrontation of Italy and the Soviet Union, but also the rejection of the communist ideology by pro-fascist Italy:

Le varie notizie confermano che il proclama del dittatore rosso era in rapporto all'ordine di ritirata generale su tutti i fronti dall'Estonia al Mar Nero. (5 luglio 1941)

Various news reports say that the red dictator appealed to the people of a general retreat on all the fronts from Estonia to the Black Sea. (July 5, 1941)

In addition to the color designation of “red” used in phrases with the lexical units “dictator”, “desertion”, “retreat”, which verbalize the negative, pejorative attitude of Italy towards the Soviet state and the Soviet communist regime, the Italian-language military-political discourse compares I.V. Stalin with the Chinese revolutionary and military leader Chiang Kai-Shek, who was one of the strongest military figures in the Kuomintang party and played a key role in uniting several provinces of China. Thus, attention is focused on the desire of the allies, including Great Britain, to influence the political situation in the Soviet Union and direct it in a favorable stream:

Quello che soprattutto Churchill reclama da Stalin è la creazione di un fronte in un qualsiasi punto dello sconfinato Paese. Per questo egli ha firmato l'alleanza che unisce indissolubilmente i conservatori britannici con i comunisti russi. Churchill vorrebbe fare di Stalin un nuovo Ciang-Kal-Shek. (17 luglio 1941)

Churchill primarily demands Stalin to establish an armored force front anywhere in his vast country. For this reason, he signed an agreement to create an alliance, which would inextricably connect the British conservatives with the Russian Communists. Churchill would like to turn Stalin into a new Chiang Kai-Shek. (July 17, 1941)

Notably, the texts of the Italian media discourse about the Ural region contain few references to other representatives of the Soviet leadership, for example, to the most eminent Soviet generals commanding separate units or leading fronts. This can be explained by the fact that the Italian media discourse pays special attention to the figure of I.V. Stalin as the head of the Soviet Union and the Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet troops, believing that it is he, as the “red dictator”, who makes the main decisions on the movement of troops and the organization of the resistance to the German and allied forces. During the analysis, we came across such names as Tymoshenko, Shaposhnikov, and Voroshilov. Each of these names was mentioned only once.

Scoppiata la guerra nel giugno scorso, dopo la cattiva prova data prima da Vorosciloff e poi da Timocenko, come capi di S. M., Boris Michailovich Schaposchnikow è tornato in scena. Oggi lo “specialista” è la più alta autorità militare dell'U.R.S.S. Sino, a quando? (19 novembre 1941)

The war broke out last June, after the unsuccessful attempts first made by Voroshilov, and then by Tymoshenko as commanders, Boris Michailovich Shaposhnikov came on the scene. Today, the “specialist” is the most eminent military figure in the USSR. How long will it last? (19 November 1941)

Thus, we can conclude that the presentation of the Soviet leadership by pro-fascist Italy was fundamentally different from the presentation of the same historical facts by the Soviet Union and France.

7. Conclusion

Media discourse of 1939-1945 is characterized by a harmonious interaction of the logical-conceptual and figurative-emotional formation. The clarification of the situation and the objectives of military activities, maintaining the combative spirit, and strengthening public compliance are the main tasks solved through the mass media sources.

The Soviet leadership is presented in the Soviet publicistic texts about the Urals as highly competent, able to conduct the appropriate personnel policy at the local level, and encourage the population of the country to self-sacrificing battling and labor. The position of allied France is represented by close attention paid to the Ural industrial rear. French-language articles dealing with the Urals region represent the Soviet leadership as capable of making radical, but wise strategic decisions and confronting the most difficult wartime challenges. Italy characterized by a pro-fascist regime considered the Soviet people and the Soviet leadership not only from the standpoint of military-political, but also ideological opponents. Italian articles on the Urals speak of the inability of Stalin and his associates to resist Hitler's troops. The Ural region was part of the belligerent country; therefore, Russian-language newspaper and publicistic texts are more emotional as compared to French and Italian texts.

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