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**Ecological consciousness of the XXI century human
and the ways of its verbalization
in the media discourse environment**Alla V. Guslyakova^{1,2}, Nina I. Guslyakova³✉, Nailya G. Valeeva¹¹*Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University),
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Abstract. The paper aims at studying and analyzing the language implementation of the development of people's ecological consciousness in the present-day Russian and English-speaking media discourse environment. The modern media discourse has become an important source of various environmental lexical units which can affect people's consciousness and change their behavior in a more eco-friendly way. The research is based on two parallel and opposite scientific approaches integrated in the media discourse which are ecologisation and anthropocentrism. The study is built on the analysis of the language models of ecological issues in different popular national and international media editions of Russia and English-speaking countries; in TV documentaries; on YouTube channels; in eco-friendly bloggers' speeches and texts. The findings of the research showed that the media discourse environment is actively inculcating "green" ideas into people's consciousness today both in Russia and abroad. More people are trying to follow the conscious consumption lifestyle. The media language is also becoming an important tool in introducing new environmental lexical units – neologisms – which are easily disseminated in the media discourse space and are actively being adopted by society. Overall, this research has confirmed the idea that the present-day language of the media discourse space is a powerful mediator of a new life sustainable development philosophy which helps human consciousness evolve in an eco-friendly way and try to make our planet a safer, healthier and more comfortable place for living.

Keywords: ecological consciousness, verbalization, lexical units, media discourse space, Russian media, English-speaking media, the third millennium civilization

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Экологическое сознание человека в XXI веке и способы его вербализации в медиадискурсивном пространстве

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Аннотация. Исследование ориентировано на изучение и анализ языковой репрезентации развития экологического сознания людей в современном русскоязычном и англоязычном медиадискурсивном пространстве. Сегодня медиадискурс – важный источник различных лексических единиц, характеризующих экологию и окружающую среду, которые могут оказывать влияние на сознание людей и корректировать их «экологическое» поведение. Рассматривается два параллельных и одновременно противоположных научных подхода, функционирующих в современном российском и зарубежном медиадискурсе, – экологизация и антропоцентризм. Исследование строится на анализе языковых экологических моделей, имплементированных в разнообразных национальных и международных СМИ России и англоязычных стран, в документальных фильмах, на видеохостинге YouTube, в выступлениях и текстах «экологических» блогеров. Результаты исследования продемонстрировали активное внедрение зеленых идей посредством медиадискурса как в России, так и за рубежом. Все больше людей пытаются вести сознательно здоровый образ жизни, избегая чрезмерного потребления. Кроме того, медиадискурс также становится важным инструментом экологических неологизмов, которые легко распространяются в медиапространстве и успешно интегрируются в российский и англоязычный обществе. В целом исследование подтвердило научное предположение о том, что современный медиадискурс является активным сподвижником новой философии устойчивого развития, которая помогает человеческому сознанию развиваться в более экологически дружественном направлении и стремиться сделать нашу планету безопасной, здоровой и комфортной для проживания человека XXI века.

Ключевые слова: экологическое сознание, вербализация, лексическая единица, российский медиадискурс, англоязычный медиадискурс, цивилизация третьего тысячелетия

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Introduction

In the present-day world ecology has become one of the most essential issues for discussion. Ecology is concerned with understanding the complexities involved in the relationships between organisms, from individuals through populations and communities to species and the biosphere, with their total environment [1]. The way in which human civilization will go further, how it will be able to cope with the difficulties arising from the current environmental situation, directly depends on people's attitude to this issue, that is from their environmental awareness. In recent years global public concern over ecological problems and technological risks has grown considerably. These concerns for the environment have become more or less institutionalized in different fields of action: research and politics, economic management, product advertisement, education and, last but not least, private life. The ecological discourse has generated new perspectives on problems, new institutional forms of problem resolution and new standards of an “ecological correctness” [2]. These environmental standards are actively represented by the contemporary media discourse environment. The media have a huge impact on people's life. Mass communication has always played a crucial role in connecting the world to an individual, and provided opportunity for the individual to communicate with a wider audience on different significant problems including the relationship between people and the environment. Nowadays when breakthrough advanced digital technologies are revolutionizing human life on the planet, the media discourse environment is actively exploiting them to make people voice their opinions on making the planet a more sustainable place to live. The news about different ecological projects or events spread like wildfire in the media discourse environment. The key concepts of “being green”, living in “green buildings”, eating “green food” can be seen in social media networks and on YouTube channels. Hence, we may assume that the media discourse is becoming an instrument to promote environmental awareness among the population and making impact on people's ecological consciousness. Thus, the main goal of this study is to perceive and analyze how the media discourse space affects human ecological consciousness and make it develop constructively. We hypothesize that the present-day media discourse has special triggers – lexical units related to the environmental issues, the perception of which produces changes in human comprehension of nature and ecological challenges in the 21st century.

The analysis of the ecological verbalized phenomenon in the media discourse environment suggests the following objectives to set and solve:

- 1) to consider the influence of media discourse environment on the life of society and people's environmental consciousness;
- 2) to study the relationship between language and environmental consciousness;
- 3) to conduct a comparative analysis of the lexical units dedicated to the environmental problems in Russian and English-speaking media discourse space which produce a positive as well as negative effect on people's ecological consciousness.

Materials and methodology

Media discourse and people's environmental consciousness. Present-day media discourse space enables people all over the world to interact and learn from each other at a tremendous pace. Any object of reality today began to be recorded

by consciousness as a media resource “encrypted” in the space surrounding a person, that is, from the point of view of not only its cultural and everyday purpose, but also its technological ability to be a media and its media potential [3]. New forms of communication, with the help of new media, have not only brought people but also communities together, thus contracting the globe into a village [4].

The outcome of such a change caused a major shift in the individual’s attitude and outlook towards the social fabric and cultural setting that underpinned the essential values and convictions deeply held by the individuals and society at large. The development of new information technologies has entailed a powerful impact on human consciousness. As a result, there is a formation of a stable dependence of a person on information technology. “Technologies overlap a person’s intellectual environment – the way he thinks and looks at the world” [5]. Thus, the media discourse space of a current epoch has invaded all spheres of society: politics, economics, art, science, sports, everyday life.

One of the most actual topics which is actively being discussed in the media discourse space at the current moment is ecology and environmental issues. The media discourse plays a crucial role as a source of information, in encouraging knowledge and concern about nature and environmental problems. Presumably, the more informed the public is about ecology and sustainable development the more likely they will be to support politicians and policies committed to environmental protection. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate mass media contributions to the formation of public environmental consciousness [6]. It is also important to notice that a significant part of this contribution is based on the ability of the new media discourse to verbalize ecological concepts which affect people’s consciousness and change their behavior in a more eco-friendly way. And the language of the media discourse possesses “an authoritative voice” which is not only a projection of people’s ideas about the future development of society and an individual, but also becomes an active agent of influence on society and human nature itself [7].

Media language and environmental consciousness: relationship and interaction. Language is a social phenomenon and therefore is constantly influenced by society, and in its turn influences social reality. Language construes the world [8] and its impact on society is possible also because of energy contained in words as nominative units of language. Words and elements of social reality are connected not only in terms of content but also in terms of structure; they show a connection to social phenomena behind them, which reveals the nature of their interaction. Names possess a performative power (symbolic power; ability to become reality while being pronounced) [9] and this power is actively implemented in the modern media discourse and what is more important in the media language itself.

One of the most crucial concepts today introduced in the media language is the idea of sustainable development of the planet. The world is obsessed with eco-friendly philosophy and lifestyle. Thus, the media language is being actively enriched with a lot of ecological terms, notions and neologisms (e.g. respecting the environment, bio-diversity, sensitive areas of the world, environmental data, etc.). Such “deep ecologisation” [8] of the media language affects its another important phenomenon which is anthropocentrism, that is the representation of the world from the point of view of humans [Ibid.]. In our opinion, the interaction between

these two phenomena – ecologisation and anthropocentrism – in the language makes a significant impact on a person’s environmental consciousness. Then the question is – what is meant by ecological (environmental) consciousness?

In general terms the ecological consciousness is understood as a reflection of the psyche of a variety of man's relationship with nature, which mediate its behavior in the “natural world”, and express axiological position of the subject of consciousness in relation to the natural world [10]. The most important matter in the definition of the notion “ecological consciousness” is that it is based on the anthropocentric and ecocentric approaches which are regarded by a number of researchers in the opposition towards each other [Ibid.]. The emphasis on one or the other of these components often depends on the specific situation of environmental risk, requiring the adoption of a decision [11; 12]. Nevertheless, both of these aspects of the ecological consciousness are integrated and reflected in the media discourse space by means of different language features. Since “words are singularly the most powerful force available to humanity and people can choose to use this force constructively with words of encouragement, or destructively using words of despair [13], the words dedicated to the actual ecological problems and represented in the language of the media, have energy and power to make changes in a person’s consciousness about his perception of the nature and the environment. In the paragraph below our study will represent the findings of the research on how verbalization of the environmental issues may affect the human ecological consciousness.

Results

The data were collected in both Russian and English-speaking media discourse environment. The study covered the statistics on the representation of the ecological information in the most powerful search engines – Yandex and Google. The analysis of the research scoped the ecological lexical units introduced in the most popular national and international media editions of Russia and the English-speaking world (Great Britain, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) which are *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Arguments and Facts*, *Kommersant*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Novaya Gazeta* (Russian Federation); *BBC*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Telegraph*, *The Independent*, *The Economist* (The United Kingdom); *CNN*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The USA Today* (The USA); *The Toronto Star*, *The National Post*, *The Vancouver Sun* (Canada); *The Australian*, *The Canberra Times*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Australia); *The New Zealand Herald*, *Auckland Star*, *The Press* (New Zealand). We also analyzed 100 different ecological documentaries and videos posted on a YouTube channel and released by the above mentioned media editions; Russian and English-speaking TV channels as well as eco-bloggers and influencers.

The results of our study showed that the main goal of the media discourse is to provide information to the ecological society through the dissemination of information about environmental problems and their solutions. “We are full of bright ideas to solve ecological problems. So let’s act on them. There is hope in the face of environmental crises. But we must all – farmers, citizens, politicians – embrace change” [14].

Within the framework of the media discourse dedicated to multiple environmental problems, a large number of lexical means are used to disseminate information. They all carry a certain message and have the task of influencing the reader's consciousness. According to the purpose of the statement and the expected result of the impact, all vocabulary can be attributed to the corresponding clusters:

1) the personification of nature/planet, the expression of the attitude towards it, as to a living being;

2) condemnation of human activities that have a negative impact on the environmental situation in the world;

3) call for humanity to lead an ecologically correct lifestyle.

When discussing the negative consequences of human impact on the world in which we live, the following words and phrases prevail in the Russian media discourse environment (see Figure 1).

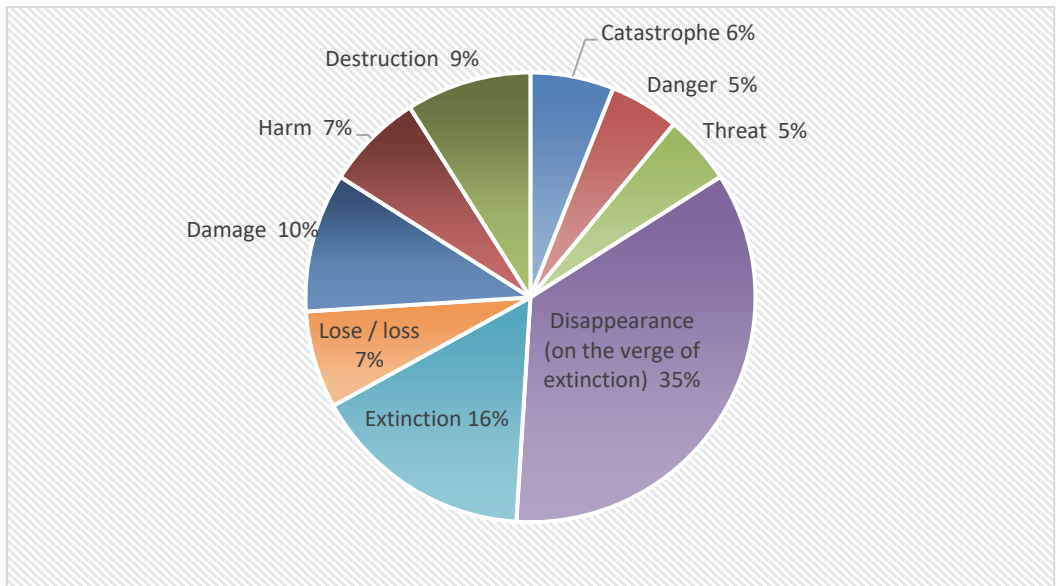


Figure 1. Lexical units characterizing natural disasters in the Russian media discourse space

For example, “Основной причиной экологической катастрофы на Камчатке могли стать токсичные водоросли. Об этом заявил директор Института вулканологии и сейсмологии ДВО РАН Алексей Озеров, слова которого приводит пресс-служба регионального правительства” (The main cause of the *ecological catastrophe* in Kamchatka could be toxic algae. This was stated by the director of the Institute of Volcanology and Seismology of the Far East Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences Alexei Ozerov, quoted by the press service of the regional government) [15].

“Множество исследований показывает, что наша разогревающаяся планета вплотную приблизилась к шестому *массовому вымиранию*” (A lot of research shows that our warming planet is close to the *sixth mass extinction*). [16].

It is also important to pay attention to such a lexical unit as “ecoterrorism”. This term has two meanings. The first one is “acts or threats of acts of a violent character committed by radical eco-activists and ‘green’ groups against individuals

or companies that, in their opinion, are guilty of environmental crimes (eco crimes)”. The purpose of such actions is to both damage and change the public consciousness, namely, to draw people’s attention to environmental problems in order to contribute to their solution. The second meaning is “a crime against nature, deliberate damage to the environment on a large scale, its pollution and destruction”. In the present-day media discourse, the term “ecoterrorism” is often used with the second meaning.

For example, “Казалось бы, совсем недавно власти приостановили работу главного ‘экологического террориста’. Так откуда тогда исходят выбросы, если источник ликвидирован?” (It would seem that quite recently the authorities suspended the work of the main “*environmental terrorist*”. So where do the emissions come from if the source is eliminated?) [17].

Within the cluster of words urging humanity to lead an ecologically friendly lifestyle, several groups of words can also be distinguished in the Russian media discourse space. For example: осознанность/осознанный (mindfulness/conscious) (20%); ответственность/ответственный (responsibility/responsible) (22%); беречь/берегающий (protect/careful) (20%); этика/этичный (ethics/ethical) (18%); разумность/разумный (reasonableness/reasonable) (20%).

For example, “Осознанное потребление в моде” (*Conscious consumption in fashion*) [18].

“Соблюдение норм этики и защиты экологии предполагают перемены” (*Compliance with ethics and environmental protection means change*) [19].

As for the English-speaking media discourse environment which inspires people to lead a more eco-friendly lifestyle, one should pay attention to such lexical concepts as *responsibility* (1,080,000,000 Google results), *consciousness* (360,000,000 Google results) and *care* (8,460,000,000 Google results) (Figure 2).

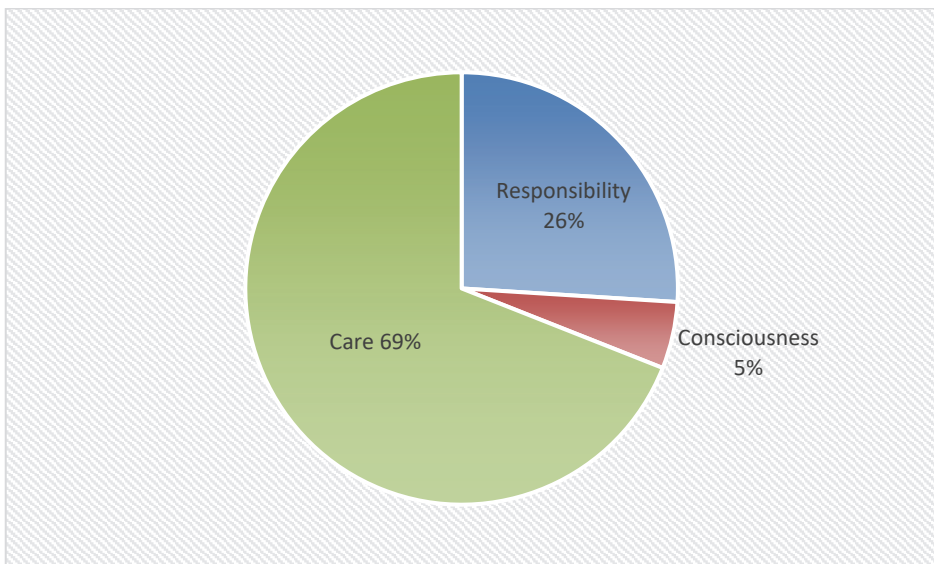


Figure 2. Lexical units characterizing individual's eco-friendly attitude to the environment in the English-language media discourse space

For example, “Other *responsibilities* of the green police include raising awareness of environmental and waste management issues among the general public” [20].

“The judges said despite significant obstacles – many parks have been closed for long periods this year after bushfires in January – there was a wide variety to the high-quality entries. ‘Their images inspire us all to appreciate, *care for* and spend time in our national parks and nature reserves,’ the judges said” [21].

One of the most popular ecological concepts being promoted by the English-speaking media discourse space and making a positive impact on the development of human environmental consciousness is *freeganism*. Freeganism is an ideology of limited participation in the conventional economy and minimal consumption of resources, particularly through recovering wasted goods like food [22]. The word “freegan” is a portmanteau of “free” and “vegan” [23]. This concept is also actively promoted in different English-speaking TV programs and on a YouTube channel (5 days of Freeganism; Freeganism: living off trash; Freeganism – a solution to food waste, etc.).

In the Russian media discourse space this ideology is not promoted but one can come across some interesting news about this latest eco trend.

For instance, “Нечто подобное начертали на своем лозунге новоявленные американские ‘мусорщики’, именующие себя *фриганами*. Название своему движению поедатели отбросов состряпали путем слияния двух слов – ‘фри’ (free – свободный) и ‘виган’ (vegan – вегетарианец). По своей идеологии фриганы – антикапиталисты. Они глубоко презирают обьевшееся общество, страдающее от несварения желудка (Something similar was inscribed on their slogan by the newly-minted American “scavengers” who call themselves freegans. The garbage eaters concocted the name of their movement by merging two words – “free” and “vegan” (from vegetarian). Freegans are anti-capitalists. They deeply despise an overgrown society suffering from indigestion) [24].

How human ecological consciousness is going to evolve in the future directly depends on the next generations and on their actions. Therefore, it is important that each new generation possesses the correct environmental values. Thus, it is good news that children and adolescents today actively express their environmental position. In addition to the world famous Greta Thunberg, there are other young activists who are trying to draw the world's attention to existing environmental problems. Within the framework of this study, the Instagram pages of such young ecobloggers as: Isra Hirsi (@israhirsi), Licypriya Kangujam (@licypriyakangujam), Leah Namugerwa (@namugerwaleah), sisters Amy and Ella Meek (@kidsagainstplastic) were analyzed. They often use the words *climate* (*climate change*) and *plastic* in their text and video messages. Hence, we can assume that the modern generation sees the biggest environmental problem in climate change and the pollution of the planet with plastic waste. And it is with these dangers that they urge to primarily fight. Moreover, some of them use the lexemes already mentioned in our research above to describe ecological problems through the personification of nature, and censure human activity (e.g. *destroying*, *killing*, *dying (dead)*, *danger*, *disaster*). They also use the concepts *save* and *help* in relation to nature. Thus, young people would like to say that modern humankind must act for the good of the planet through ecological actions. Their posts focus on the discussions about their activities, environmental goals, plans and results they have achieved. They

often use such lexical concepts as *encourage*, *motivate* and *inspire*. Thus, with these young people's media activities, they motivate their subscribers to be active in environmental issues, and try to change this modern world for the better.

Conclusion

Nowadays one of the most relevant and actively discussed topics in the media discourse environment is the problem of ecology, nature conservation and sustainable development on the planet. This is due to the fact that humanity today is facing a great number of ecological problems such as different types of pollution, deforestation, global warming, hunger and poverty, pure and clean water deficit, etc. To preserve the environment and stabilize the ecological situation, humans need to take active measures at present. Therefore, how humanity will react to these global problems and will be able to cope with all of them, largely depends on people's ecological consciousness.

Our research aimed at analyzing the role of lexical means used in the contemporary Russian and English-speaking media discourse space in the formation and development of human environmental consciousness.

Our findings revealed that there is a close relationship between language and a person's ecological consciousness as well as a significant role of the media discourse as an important source and influencer of multiple eco-friendly concepts, ideas and beliefs.

The study of the lexical tokens represented in the media discourse space demonstrated a great interest of the modern society in the discussion of environmental issues and constructive ways of their solution. This fact may indicate a significant step in the increase of people's environmental awareness both in Russia and abroad. Besides, new lexical units – ecological neologisms – are actively appearing in the media discourse today due to new breakthrough scientific achievements, the emergence of new information in the field of ecology, and, in principle, with the development of the ecological knowledge. This fact again testifies to the evolution of environmental consciousness in society.

Thus, we may conclude that the present-day media language as well as the media discourse environment itself have become a great trigger in the promotion of vital ecological values which influence the human understanding of themselves as an integral part of the third millennium civilization who must raise their ecological consciousness to preserve the planetary heritage of our ancestors and pass on a more sustainable ideology to future generations.

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