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Research article

## Pragmatics of verifiers in the aspect of active processes in Russian Internet media discourse

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**Abstract.** The study discusses the linguo-pragmatic potential of verification markers in the discourse of Russian Internet media. The relevance of the study is conditioned by the linguistic and general humanitarian significance of identifying and interpreting the linguopragmatic effects of non-standard use of verifiers as a manifestation of active processes in the Russian language. The aim of the study is to analyze the factive predicates *выяснилось* ‘it was found out’, *установлено* ‘it was established’, *подтвердилось* ‘it was confirmed’, *было доказано* ‘it was proved’, *стало известно* ‘it became known’, etc. in the context of propositional attitudes and their role in the discursive implementation of non-cooperative communication strategies in Russian speech. The method of linguo-pragmatic interpretation of non-usual communicative strategies is used, based on a complex research procedure for describing active processes in the Russian language, on the method of cognitive-discursive analysis of corpus data, as well as on the ideas and principles of foreign applied and “affective” pragmatics. The research material is language data from the newspaper subcorpus of the Russian National Corpus (200 contexts with verifiers). The study describes ambiguous and internally contradictory models of factual propositional knowledge attitudes and their discursive implementation in propositions that do not have a reference to a reliable and/or proven fact. A connection has been established between such cases and models of language anomaly, because a speaker normally cannot have contradictory intentions. It is shown that these cases contain a contradiction between the propositional knowledge attitude obtained with certainty and the uncertain content of the proposition. For pragmatic anomalies generated by verifiers, a “conflict of modalities” has been established (reliable and unreliable, factual and hypothetical, knowledge and assumption, etc.). It is concluded that such non-usual uses of verification markers are associated either with the intention of the media text author to implement a manipulative strategy *de re*, or just with the speaker’s insufficient linguistic and communicative competence within the framework of *bona fide*. The prospects for the study are in the expansion of its empirical base with discursive indicators of truth (*истинно* ‘truly’, *подлинно* ‘actually’, *действительно* ‘really’, etc.), as well as by involving other highly influential discourses (political, advertising, poetic, etc.).

**Keywords:** factual predicates, truth indicators, propositional attitude, conflict of modalities, pragmatic anomalies, actual tendencies, Internet media discourse, corpus analysis, the Russian language

**Authors’ contribution:** *Issers O.S., Radbil T.B.* — research concept, collection and processing of materials, analysis of the data obtained, writing the text.

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## Introduction

In the modern interdisciplinary paradigm of humanitarian knowledge, one of the most demanded research areas is the study of active processes in the Russian language (Russian Language in Internet Communication, 2021). This field of research is now being considerably expanded to include a wide variety of discursive practices. They can be regarded as a kind of “laboratories” of linguistic innovations — zones with the most active spread of “growth points of new phenomena” (Apresyan, 1990). First, media discourse should be attributed to zones, where the most significant changes in the worldviews, value priorities, and speech-behavioral society models are recorded. This is reflected in modern media linguistics studies (Duskaeva, 2019; Tsvetova, 2020). On the other hand, significant transformations at all levels of the language system and features of its speech realization, caused by specific conditions of communication, are observed today in the communicative environment of the Internet, as evidenced by scientific developments in the new scientific field — Internet linguistics (Russian language in Internet communication, 2021; Facchinetti, 2021). Thus, it seems quite reasonable to turn to the specific area of active processes in the Russian language — media discourse of Russian mass media in its Internet type (Negryshev, 2020). At the same time, we are interested in linguistic-pragmatic aspects of these phenomena in terms of communicative-pragmatic or pragmatic-stylistic analysis of the text as it is presented in the works (Black, 2006; Paducheva, 2010; Scarantino, 2017).

So, today active processes in vocabulary, word formation and stylistics have been studied quite fully (Russian language of the early XXI century... 2014; Nikolina et al., 2020), to a lesser extent in grammar, and even lesser — in pragmatics. Meanwhile, the pragma-oriented innovative phenomena can be the most indicative, because they reflect certain symptomatic changes in the intentional sphere of speakers, in their speech strategies and tactics, i.e., in what can be called the cumulative communicative environment of modern sociocultural space (Issers, 2020; Orr & Ariel, 2021). “In the communicative environment of mass media, the values of certain political, social, or cultural groups are defended, disavowed, challenged, and the mass media discourse itself acts as a powerful tool not so much to reflect as to form a ‘value model of the world’ in society, using a variety of means of linguistic influence, including manipulative ones” (Radbil, 2021: 407).

The scientific tools of the cognitive-discursive approach based on the analysis of corpus data (Chernyavskaya, 2018; Radbil, 2020) seem to be a reliable methodological basis for identifying and interpreting various pragmatic effects, including

those related to the phenomena of unfair communication, conflicting or manipulative narrative models in journalistic texts, which are based precisely on linguistic-pragmatic mechanisms. In this paper, we are interested in only one such mechanism, namely, ambiguous and internally contradictory models of discourse realization of factual propositional knowledge attitudes, so-called “verifiers” (such as *выяснилось* ‘it became clear’, *установлено* ‘it was established’, *подтвердилось* ‘it was confirmed’, *было доказано* ‘it was proved’, *стало известно* ‘it has come to light’, etc.) with propositions that have no reference to a reliable and/or proven fact. Contexts of this kind in our studies are referred to as “representational contexts” (Radbil, 2021). Interesting linguistic-pragmatic effects arising in this kind of usage are, in our opinion, very indicative of the realization of specific intentions of authors, including non-cooperative ones, which can be considered as linguistic-pragmatic and/or narrative anomalies within the framework of the theory of linguistic anomalies developed by one of the authors (Radbil, 2006).

The above-mentioned facts formulate the **aim of our research** — to identify and interpret the linguistic-pragmatic effects of the non-standard use of verifiers in the context of propositional attitude in the discourse of Russian Internet media, as well as to determine their role in the discourse realization of non-cooperative communicative strategies.

### Methods and materials

The paper applies the research procedure of linguistic-pragmatic interpretation of non-usual communicative strategies based on the complex methodology of describing active processes in the Russian language (New Trends... 2016), on the method of cognitive-discourse analysis (Sokolova, 2017) and corpus data analysis (Chernyavskaya, 2018; Radbil, 2020), on the technology of communicative-pragmatic study of Internet communication (Issers, 2022), as well as on the ideas and principles of foreign applied and “affective” pragmatics (Scarantino, 2017; Noveck, 2021).

We analyze verifiers (*выяснилось* ‘it became clear’, *установлено* ‘it was established’, *подтвердилось* ‘it was confirmed’, *было доказано* ‘it was proved’, *стало известно* ‘it has come to light’, etc.) acting as propositional attitudes in propositions where the semantics of the event or fact is weakened or eliminated; from the syntactic point of view, the presented models have the structure of a compound sentence with an explanatory-object subordinate clause.

The material of the study is linguistic data from the newspaper corpus of the Russian National Corpus (RNC). The volume of the examined material is about 200 contexts of these verifiers use.

### Results

In normal, i.e., cooperative use of the Russian language, factual predicates *выяснилось* ‘it became clear’, *установлено* ‘it was established’, *подтвердилось* ‘it was confirmed’, *было доказано* ‘it was proved’, *стало известно* ‘it has come

to *light*' perform the role of propositional attitudes in propositions that contain precise knowledge about an event or a reliably established fact.

However, our study describes ambiguous and internally contradictory models of discourse realization of factual propositional knowledge attitudes in propositions that have no reference to a reliable and/or proven fact.

We have established the connection of such cases with the patterns of linguistic anomalies due to the fact that a Russian speaker cannot normally have contradictory intentions. For pragmatic anomalies generated by verifiers, a “conflict of modalities” (reliable and unreliable, factual and hypothetical, knowledge and assumption, etc.) has been established.

The following types of the “conflict of modalities” have been revealed:

(1) contradiction between the semantics of the propositional attitude expressing the result of obtaining reliable knowledge and the content of the main proposition with uncertain information about something; a stronger version of the above “conflict of modalities” occurs when the subjective-modal indicator of unreliability — the particle *якобы* ‘*ostensibly*’ — is used in the proposition.

(2) violation of the restriction on the propositional content of factual predicatives due to the fact that their use as a propositional attitude is incorrect in relation to propositions referring to the description of physical reality, hypothetical reality or intentions of other persons.

(3) the peculiarities of the proposition content when verifiers are used as the propositional attitudes, related to the lack of their reference to real events or facts: these may be generalized judgments, hypothetical judgments, judgments contradicting common sense or violating logic.

The types of “conflict of modalities” described in this paper can be conditioned either by a conscious decision of the author to realize a manipulative strategy *de re*, or simply by the speaker's insufficient linguistic and communicative competence within the *bona fide* framework.

## Discussion

In normal Russian-language communication, based on the principles of communicative cooperation, i.e., the consistency of contributions of the communication participants at each stage (Grice, 1985; Paducheva, 2010), verifiers — predicatives with the semantics of establishing reliable knowledge about reality, are used in the role of propositional attitudes in propositions that have a reference to accurate facts or actual events, for example:

However, *выяснилось* ‘*it soon became clear*’ that the building was constructed in violation of the rules (Parlamentskaya Gazeta, 20.12.2021).

According to the results of the auto-technical forensic examination, *было установлено* ‘*it was found out*’ that the actions of the Mercedes driver did not comply with traffic rules, which caused the accident (Vedomosti, 10.12.2021).

*Подтвердилось* ‘*It has now been officially confirmed*’ that Grudinin failed to notify the Russian fiscal authorities within the timeframe specified by law about his 13 Swiss bank accounts (Moskovsky Komsomolets, 06.07.2018).

Earlier, on November 22, *стало известно* ‘*it became known*’ that confectioners warned retailers about the imminent increase in prices for their products due to the rising cost of raw materials, packaging and fuel and lubricants (Vedomosti, 24.11.2021).

*Было доказано* ‘*it was proved*’ in court that a pharmacist of one of the pharmacies without a prescription piece by piece sold capsules, which customers could use as drugs (Parlamentskaya Gazeta, 05.02.2019).

However, in Russian media speech, in some cases with specific intentions of media authors or simply incorrect use of the modal indicator in the discourse, there is a situation when the verifier is used with a proposition that has no reference to a fact that has been reliably established or an event that has actually occurred, for example: And then *выяснилось* ‘*it turned out*’ that *we do not know who it was* (Kommersant, 04.10.2010).

We can see here a contradiction between the propositional attitude of knowledge obtained with certainty and the indeterminate content of the proposition (we do not know who it was). Such cases are treated as linguistic anomalies due to the fact that a speaker cannot normally have contradictory intentions (Apresyan, 1990; Bulygina, Shmelev, 1997) (i.e., what is not clarified cannot be clarified). Anomalies of this kind are treated as pragmatic because they are related to the contradiction between *modus* and *dictum*, between propositional attitude and proposition, between communicative intention and its realization in the speech practices of Russian native speakers. We interpret such phenomena as “conflict of modalities” (reliable and unreliable, factual and hypothetical, knowledge and assumption, etc.).

The first type of “conflict of modalities” is the contradiction between the semantics of the propositional attitude expressing the result of obtaining reliable knowledge and the content of the main proposition with uncertain information about something: *Как выяснилось* ‘*as it turned out*’, the situation about unification with the Union of Right Forces remains uncertain (Vesti.ru, 10.06.2006).

In normal logical reasoning, certainty removes uncertainty. Here, for one reason or another, it does not happen: *Выяснилось* ‘*it turned out*’ that funds often disappear in an unknown direction (Vesti.ru, 06.12.2012).

We must note that in the last example the pragmatic anomaly is weaker due to the theme-rheme partitioning. In particular, the segment “in an unknown direction” is the rhema, so the whole expression can be interpreted as follows: the disappearance of funds (in the position of theme as known) is considered to be an established fact, only the direction is not established.

A stronger version of this “conflict of modalities” occurs when the subjective-modal indicator of unreliability — the particle *якобы* ‘*ostensibly*’ — is used in a proposition: “Particle. Denotes the presumptuousness of a statement, indicates doubt”<sup>1</sup>:

<sup>1</sup> Evgenieva, A.P. (1988). (Ed.) The Dictionary of the Russian Language. Vol. 4. S–YA. 3rd edition, stereotype. Moscow: Russky Yazyk Publ.

At the passport control *выяснилось ‘it turned out’* that the bishop’s documents were *якобы ‘ostensibly’* invalid (Izvestia, 14.02.2019).

And then *выяснилось ‘it turned out’* that it was *ostensibly* a joint test of a missile defense system conducted by the US and Israel (Komsomolskaya Pravda, 05.09.2013).

In the course of the investigation *было установлено ‘there were revealed’* ten episodes when the patients were *ostensibly* handcuffed and not allowed to move freely (Kommersant, 13.04.2013).

*Стало известно, что ‘it became known that’* in the autumn of 2017 Tereshin was *ostensibly* caught driving under the influence of alcohol (Izvestia, 01.02.2018).

As we see, the strongest version of this model of pragmatic anomaly occurs in contexts where the particle *якобы ‘ostensibly’* extends the predicate, i.e., characterizes the whole situation, not a separate, rhema-accentuated fragment of it, for example:

However, a few months later *выяснилось ‘it turned out’ that the loan was ostensibly granted* (Komsomolskaya Pravda, 01.03.2011).

However, *выяснилось ‘it turned out’* that Finnish laws *ostensibly do not allow* creating funds in favor of an individual (Trud-7, 14.10.2005).

*Было установлено ‘it was found out’* that he *ostensibly* beat not only Shcherbakov, but also other soldiers (Lenta.ru, 22.03.2010);

Earlier *стало известно ‘it became known’* that Mikhail Efremov *ostensibly did not admit his guilt* in a fatal traffic accident (Vesti.ru, 03.07.2020).

In such cases, a somewhat strange situation arises in Russian speech, when the speaker in the propositional setting informs that what he intends to talk about further is a reliable fact, but in the proposition expresses doubts in its reliability: It was canceled in December 2019, when *выяснилось ‘it turned out’* that the journalist *ostensibly engaged in activities* that do not correspond to the stated purpose of the trip (Vesti.ru, 31.01.2020).

Such anomalies, however, also have the potential for rational reinterpretation and can be removed if the context unambiguously indicates what is supposedly a signal of someone else’s point of view, disagreement with someone else’s position in the mode of de dicto strategy (Bulygina, Shmelev, 1997). In such cases, the propositional attitude contains an indication of the source of the message that does not coincide with the speaker, for example:

*“Стало известно ‘it became known’ from a source in the investigative bodies* that the kidnapping of the first vice-president of LUKOIL had been *ostensibly* organized by ‘order from above’ ” (Argumenty i Fakty, 09.10.2002).

Yesterday *от наших источников стало известно ‘our sources informed us’* that one of the suspects, Oleg Alimov, was *ostensibly* released from custody (Komsomolskaya Pravda, 30.08.2007).

This is most obvious in the first-person mode: But as soon as I started to show results, *выяснилось ‘it immediately became clear’* that I *ostensibly* had some supernatural advantages (Sovetsky Sport, 13.08.2011).

The next type of “conflict of modalities” in Russian media speech is related to the violation of J.R. Searle’s conditions of success, namely — restrictions on propositional content for speech acts of a certain type (Searle, 1986). We know the philosophical thesis of H. Reichenbach that one cannot have a reliable protocol about the future. In other words, a judgment about what will happen in the future, e.g.: “It will rain tomorrow”, can only have a probabilistic but not a reliable character. Thus, a propositional attitude expressing the establishment of a reliable fact cannot be attributed to a proposition with the content is oriented to the future. In other words, the model ‘Выяснилось ‘it has been found out’ / *установлено ‘it was established’ / подтвердилось ‘it was confirmed’*, etc., that there will be R.’ is logically untenable in relation to statements describing the future state of physical reality.

However, in our examples from Russian media speech such statements are numerous, e.g.:

*Выяснилось ‘it turned out’* that 32 percent of participants *will not consume* alcohol at all on New Year holidays (Parlamentskaya Gazeta, 28.12.2021).

*Установлено ‘it has been established’* that the content of TV channels *will be unified* in all channels (Parlamentskaya Gazeta, 23.06.2021).

Earlier *стало известно ‘it became known’* that the Central Bank *will identify and record* unfair practices during inspections of financial organizations (Parlamentskaya Gazeta, 15.11.2021).

Apparently, for similar reasons of violating the propositional content restriction, pragmatically anomalous propositional attitudes of verification of reliable knowledge should not normally be used in propositions describing the intentions of others (one cannot accurately establish someone’s intention if that someone has not communicated it), for example: *Подтвердилось ‘it has been confirmed’* that they [NATO forces against Serbs] *intend* to use force (Vesti.ru, 24.03.2009).

Anomalies of this kind are also rationally reinterpreted and removed if the proposition does not refer to physical reality but to some ideal sphere:

– for example, to the sphere of laws, of the due rather than existing: *Установлено ‘it was established’* that authorized bodies or hunting farms *will issue* hunting permits for a specific territory for a specific period (Parliamentary Gazette, 22.06.2021).

– or to the sphere of the conceivable, which may occur under certain conditions: *Установлено ‘it has been established’* that investigators of the Investigation Committee *will take part* in preliminary investigations on three articles of the Criminal Code if they have identified these crimes (Parlamentskaya Gazeta, 12.07.2021).

Finally, another type of the considered pragmatic-linguistic effect of the “conflict of modalities” in Russian is related to certain content features of a proposition, which for one reason or another does not refer to real events or facts. For example, a proposition may contain a generalized judgment with the status of some “eternal truth”, of universal significance, obligatory for all people:

At the same time, *подтвердилось ‘it was confirmed’* that shortcomings are a hypertrophied continuation of merits (Izvestia, 08.01.2002).

**Было доказано ‘it has already been proved’** earlier that love is a chemical process (Trud-7, 11.03.2010).

– or a judgment that contradicts common sense and practical logic:

This is where **подтвердилось ‘it was confirmed’** to the most vivid degree that wizards really live among us (“Ilewski Krai”, 10.02.2012).

Here, for the first time in the world, **было доказано ‘it was proved’** that telepathy exists, that a metal chamber shielding electromagnetic waves also shields the transmission of thought (Trud-7, 14.09.2000).

The anomaly of such a pragmatic-linguistic model lies in the fact that the operational sphere of unconditional, reliable knowledge includes propositions of hypothetical content, i.e. what is yet to be ever known and proved, e.g.: In the process of Polyakov’s flight, elements of **a future flight to Mars were practiced**, it was proved that the human body is able to withstand it (Izvestia, 26.10.2012).

Manipulateness of these communicative strategies becomes obvious in cases when under the powerful defense of reliable knowledge of universal truth there are very controversial, in any case far from unconditional positions, which cannot be accepted “by default”, but, on the contrary, are still in need of argumentation, for example:

Since then, **было доказано ‘it has been proved’** many times that sugar has no sins (Argumenty i Fakty, 25.04.2001).

**Было доказано ‘it has been proved’** that a cow’s heartbeat has a relaxing effect on humans (Lenta.ru, 22.10.2020);

For example, **было доказано ‘it was previously proved’** that yawning cools the brain (Vesti.ru, 14.05.2012).

The manipulative mechanism of the above models of “conflict of modalities” is especially pronounced in contexts when the meaning of the propositional attitude of establishing reliable knowledge is reinforced by explicit indicators of unconditional truthfulness of the judgment, for example, the determinant **доподлинно ‘definitely’**: **Доподлинно известно ‘it is definitely known’** that there will be a scandal. // — We want to keep the intrigue around the show until the last moment (Komsomolskaya Pravda, 17.04.2012).

In this fragment, the evaluative characteristic of the event, and even referred to the future, cannot be verified at all, checked for conformity to reality, and with the explicit intensifier of a strong degree of certainty, authentically.

Also, the manipulative strategy of “reading in hearts” can be realized by means of the intensifier **доподлинно ‘definitely’**, when the speaker establishes with unconditional certainty the degree of other people’s impression of what they have seen, i.e. what cannot be verified, for example: But **доподлинно известно ‘it is definitely known’** that the exhibition shocked the audience... (lenta.ru, 14.11.2019).

Particularly indicative in this respect are the somewhat strange uses of this strengthened propositional attitude in the context of a proposition whose content is at least doubtful or simply meaningless, or even deliberately false:

**Доподлинно известно ‘it is definitely known’** that the great artist was addicted to dark forces and practiced magic (Komsomolskaya Pravda, 22.09.2005).



What to do when *доподлинно известно* ‘*it is definitely known*’ that a huge meteorite is coming to the Earth and the end of the world is inevitable? (Izvestia, 13.07.2012).

As the representative of the court stated, им *доподлинно известно* ‘*it is definitely known*’ that Jesus Christ is not a candidate of any political party (Lenta.ru, 16.05.2002).

Such communicative strategies of the authors of Russian media texts are undoubtedly aimed at increasing the impact on the audience and creating expression. But at the same time, they have all the signs of manipulateness: the addressee, through the speaker's use of the propositional attitude of an established and, therefore, well-known fact, is purposefully deprived of the possibility to dispute the reported fact. Indeed, it is impossible to argue with the immutable objective truth, which is known to everyone. Behind the speaker's back there is a powerful defense in the person of all mankind.

### Conclusion

In general, this study has once again revealed the essential pragmatic-linguistic possibilities of verifiers in Russian speech, which in normal, cooperative speech communication seem to be intended to serve only as auxiliary, purely “technical” discourse indicators, markers of the reliability of a certain judgment. However, our material shows that their functions in Russian Internet media speech are much more diverse and broader. In particular, verifiers as factual propositional attitudes, which bring the established truth, confirmed knowledge into the circle of consideration, in fact often act as mechanisms of evading the truth, distorting knowledge, i.e., they do not clarify something, as they should, but, on the contrary, confuse it.

It is also worth noting the significant expressive and influential potential of verifiers, which is exploited in Russian media speech in order to realize the manipulative strategy *de re*, to introduce into the audience's consciousness unaccepted ideas and values, for some reason defended by the authors. At the same time, in some cases, one cannot rule out the fact that the authors of media texts simply do not use the arsenal of discourse means of the Russian language correctly due to their insufficient linguistic and communicative competence.

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Научная статья

## Прагматика верификаторов в свете активных процессов в дискурсе отечественных интернет-СМИ

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**Аннотация.** Рассмотрен лингвопрагматический потенциал маркеров верификации в дискурсе отечественных интернет-СМИ. Актуальность исследования связана с лингвистической и общегуманитарной значимостью выявления и интерпретации лингвопрагматических эффектов нестандартного употребления верификаторов как проявления активных процессов в русском языке. Цель исследования — анализ фактивных предикатов *выяснилось, установлено, подтвердилось, было доказано, стало известно* в контексте пропозициональной установки с точки зрения их роли в дискурсной реализации некооперативных коммуникативных стратегий в русской речи. Применяется методика лингвопрагматической интерпретации неузуальных коммуникативных стратегий, основанная на комплексной исследовательской процедуре описания активных процессов в русском языке, на методе когнитивно-дискурсивного анализа корпусных данных, а также на идеях и принципах зарубежной прикладной и «аффективной» прагматики. Материалом исследования явились языковые данные, извлеченные из газетного корпуса в составе Национального корпуса русского языка. Объем обследованного материала — около 200 контекстов употребления верификаторов. Описаны неоднозначные и внутренне противоречивые модели дискурсной реализации фактивных пропозициональных установок знания при пропозициях, не имеющих референции к достоверному и / или доказанному факту. Установлена связь подобных случаев с моделями языковой аномальности, обусловленными тем, что русскоязычный говорящий в норме не может иметь противоречивые интенции. Показано, что в данных случаях мы имеем дело с противоречием между пропозициональной установкой знания, полученного с достоверностью, и неопределенным содержанием пропозиции. Для прагматических аномалий, порожденных речевой реализацией верификаторов, установлен «конфликт модальностей» (достоверной и недостоверной, фактивной и гипотетической, знанием и предположением и пр.). Сделан вывод о связи

подобных неузуальных употреблений маркеров верификации либо с осознанной установкой автора медиатекста на реализацию манипулятивной стратегии *de re*, либо просто с недостаточной языковой и коммуникативной компетенцией говорящего в рамках *bona fide* («добросовестного заблуждения»). Перспективы исследования связаны с расширением его эмпирической базы за счет включения дискурсных показателей истинности (*истинно, подлинно, действительно* и т.д.), а также за счет вовлечения в область исследования и других дискурсов активного воздействия (политический, рекламный, художественный и т.д.) в русском языке.

**Ключевые слова:** фактологические предикаты, показатели истинности, пропозициональная установка, конфликт модальностей, прагматические аномалии, актуальные тенденции, медиадискурс Интернета, корпусный анализ, русский язык

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