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Original Theoretical Research



Linguistic and Cultural Analysis of Texts on Rostov-On-Don Urban Discourse

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Abstract

Introduction. In the contemporary humanities paradigm, the city is interpreted as a text. This approach makes it possible to conduct research focused on the specific information that such a text can convey within the context of urban discourse. Therefore, the need to study urban texts as tools for shaping local identity in a multicultural society during an era of global change is becoming increasingly relevant and significant. The aim of this study is to identify the specific linguistic and cultural markers in texts of the urban environment of Rostov-on-Don and to determine the cultural connotations associated with local identity.

Materials and Methods. The study focused on the city's most significant elements: urban graffiti and murals, signs, slogans, advertisements, urban folklore, as well as the connotations that shape perceptions of the city and attitudes toward it. A comprehensive combination of linguistic and discursive analysis methods is employed, taking into account semiotic, ethnolinguistic, and sociocultural aspects, which allows for the identification of key linguistic and cultural markers reflecting local identity.

Results. It has been established that the linguistic and cultural specificity of texts in Rostov-on-Don's urban discourse is characterized by hybridity, combining traditional and global elements; regionalisms that emphasize local identity; and visual mythologization that references literary images associated with the city's history.

Discussion and Conclusion. The texts of Rostov-on-Don's urban space form a polyphonic discourse in which linguistic devices, dialectal elements, and symbolic images construct the city's unique semiotic space. Rostov-on-Don's urban discourse creates a unique cultural code that combines local traditions with global trends.

Keywords: urban discourse, city as text, semiotic space, cultural code, graffiti, murals, urban folklore, multicultural image, hybridity

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Оригинальное теоретическое исследование

Лингвокультурный анализ текстов урбанистического дискурса Ростова-на-Дону

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Аннотация

Введение. В современной гуманитарной парадигме город трактуется как текст. Этим обусловлена возможность вести исследовательские поиски в фокусе специфической информации, которую такой текст может транслировать в условиях урбанистического дискурса. Поэтому необходимость изучения городских текстов как инструментов формирования локальной идентичности в условиях мультикультурного общества в эпоху глобальных перемен приобретает все большую актуальность и значимость. Цель исследования – выявить специфику лингвокультур-

ных маркеров в текстах городской среды Ростова-на-Дону и определить культурные коннотации, связанные с локальной идентичностью.

Материалы и методы. Материалом исследования послужили наиболее важные элементы города: городские граффити и муралы, вывески, слоганы, реклама, городской фольклор, а также коннотации, определяющие восприятие города и отношение к нему. Используется комплексное сочетание методов лингвистического и дискурсивного анализа с учетом семиотического, этнолингвистического и социокультурного аспектов, что позволяет выявить ключевые лингвистические и культурные маркеры, отражающие локальную идентичность.

Результаты исследования. Установлено, что лингвокультурная специфика текстов урбанистического дискурса Ростова-на-Дону характеризуется гибридностью, сочетая в себе традиционные и глобальные элементы; регионализмами, подчеркивающими локальную идентичность; визуальной мифологизацией с отсылкой к литературным образам, связанным с историей города.

Обсуждение и заключение. Тексты городского пространства Ростова-на-Дону формируют полифонический дискурс, в котором языковые средства, диалектные элементы и символические образы конструируют уникальное семиотическое пространство города. Урбанистический дискурс Ростова-на-Дону создает уникальный культурный код, сочетающий в себе локальные традиции и глобальные тренды.

Ключевые слова: урбанистический дискурс, город как текст, семиотическое пространство, культурный код, граффити, муралы, городской фольклор, мультикультурный образ, гибридность

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Introduction. The modern city is a complex semiotic space where verbal and nonverbal signs form the cultural code of the territory [1]. Every city has its own unique code, a system of linguistic signs that require interpretation [2, p. 45], upon which urban discourse is built.

The linguistic character of cities has attracted the attention of many scholars, including historians, architects, cultural studies scholars, and philosophers. Linguists initially approached this issue from a sociolinguistic perspective [3]. In contemporary research, the city is viewed from a semiotic perspective “as a cauldron of texts and codes” [1, p. 325], and it is noted that language in the city’s text is characterized by opposing tendencies – on the one hand, toward differentiation, and on the other, toward integration [4]. The text of the city helps us understand how language arose, developed, and spread, and what contribution a particular social group has made to the evolution of the Russian language and Russian culture [5, pp. 257–258].

Various global trends in the evolution of urban daily life are making urban space more open. This openness creates room for the free incorporation of elements of the city’s semiotic code, which constitute key features of its essence. Modern cities – are complex systems in which physical structures interact with cultural, social, and economic processes. Communication is largely determined by the fact that city dwellers constitute a multinational and heterogeneous society. The language of communication among city dwellers is also characterized by heterogeneity [6]. City residents demonstrate variability in linguistic means and cultural characteristics in the texts they produce. It is precisely in textual activity that individual and group socio-cultural principles and stereotypes manifest themselves [7, pp. 12–13]. Therefore, the need to study urban texts as instruments for constructing local identity in the context of global change is becoming increasingly relevant.

This publication is devoted to a sociolinguistic description of the urban discourse in Rostov-on-Don, the largest city in southern Russia. The aim of the study is to identify the specific features of linguistic and cultural markers in texts about the urban environment of Rostov-on-Don and to determine the cultural connotations associated with local identity.

As the largest multiethnic city, Rostov-on-Don serves as a prime case study for this research, as it possesses a unique linguistic and cultural environment where the past meets the present and where the region’s historical, social, and economic characteristics are reflected. Founded in 1749 as a border fortress, the city has evolved into a key economic and cultural hub that embodies imperial, Soviet, and postmodern legacies. However, to date, a comprehensive analysis of its spatial organization – one that synthesizes semiotic, synergetic, cultural-historical, and textual paradigms – has remained almost entirely outside of academic discourse. This paper attempts to analyze the city’s most important elements: the marker categories of urban streets and squares, textual representations, and their inherent leitmotifs.

Rostov-on-Don demonstrates how the urban text becomes a battleground of meanings: its mercantile past, Soviet symbols, migration dynamics, and digitalization form a multilayered “palimpsest.” All these cultural, social, and historical layers influence linguistic processes that manifest in texts [8]. “Reading” the city’s text requires taking local characteristics into account: from Cossack identity to the role of the Don River as a natural and cultural axis. The study of Rostov-on-Don

as a “local text” confirms that the concept of the “urban text” remains a tool for revealing the uniqueness of a place in an era of globalization, which is increasingly giving way to “glocalization” (from “globalization + localization”).

As a text, Rostov-on-Don possesses many dimensions. This study demonstrates how different layers and their interactions form a complex urban system.

Materials and Methods. The research methodology is quite complex, as is the problem itself: it employs a comprehensive combination of various methods, ranging from linguistic and discursive analysis. Ethnolinguistic and sociocultural aspects are also taken into account. Together, they allow us to identify the linguistic and cultural specificity of texts functioning in urban space. The research material consists of the most significant elements of the city: marker categories of urban graffiti and murals, textual images on signs and billboards, advertisements, and connotations that shape perceptions of the city and attitudes toward it. The sample includes 155 items: billboards (35), signs (35), slogans (25), graffiti (20), murals (15), and urban folklore (25).

Results. An examination of trends and patterns in urban communication across various sectors of Rostov-on-Don, a city with a population of over one million, presents a fascinating picture. It could serve as highly valuable material for linguistic research. It is important to note that Rostov-on-Don is a multicultural city and the capital of the Rostov Region. Its history and culture are closely linked to the cultural development of our country.

An analysis of Rostov-on-Don as a “local text” confirms that the city, as a text, possesses multiple dimensions [9, 10]. In this sense, it is interesting to examine how different layers and their interactions form the city’s complex semiotic system. An analysis of the most important marker elements of urban discourse that shape perceptions of the city and attitudes toward it – such as graffiti and murals, signs, urban slogans, advertising, and urban folklore – allows us to draw the following conclusions:

1. Graffiti and murals, as a form of public discourse, combine protest, historical memory, and irony, using dialectal vocabulary to mark local identity.
2. Advertising hybridizes global and local codes, turning ethnic stereotypes into commodities.
3. Urban folklore adapts to the digital environment while retaining its function as a social mirror.

Next, we will support our conclusions with specific examples from urban discourse.

1. Graffiti: Between Protest and Local Identity

Graffiti and murals in Rostov-on-Don function as semiotic markers reflecting social and cultural conflicts. Our analysis has identified their main connotations:

– Historical memory: images of Don Cossacks, quotes from M.A. Sholokhov’s novel “Quiet Don”, such as the graffiti on Pushkinskaya Street that reads: “*Here they spoke the Don dialect*”. Another example is the mural on the end of one of the buildings on Pushkinskaya Street: a depiction of a young woman scattering gold coins around her. The older generation unequivocally associates it with the turbulent times of the past, and the woman is called Sonya Golden Hand. However, young people tend to associate this image with the revival of Rostov-on-Don, its hospitality, and generosity.

– Political protest: protest themes are expressed in anti-war slogans (“*No to war!*”), stylized, among other things, as Cossack proverbs (“*The Cossack sows peace – war has not taken root*”).

– Popular culture: Memes with a local flavor, such as the “*Rostov*” cat with a saber, are conveyed not only through images but also in spoken and written language.

– Graffiti with linguistic features: the use of South Russian dialectisms, such as “*чиркамь*” (to cry) and “*баз*” (house). Another example is hybrid forms of inscriptions: “*Ростов – наихач*” (from the Armenian “խաչ” (khach) – cross, but in slang – an ethnic stereotype).

– Socially critical graffiti: for example, graffiti in the area of demolished pre-revolutionary buildings reading “*Restore the historic appearance!*” or “*Rostov is not a dump!*” as a form of environmental activism. Such messages call for a mindful approach to urban space.

– Artistic murals: for example, a *portrait of Chekhov* as a reference to the region’s literary heritage; or an image of a Cossack with the inscription: “*The Don is our everything*” as a mythologization of the Cossacks.

Consequently, graffiti and murals serve as visual markers of local history, while their textual elements function as a form of social expression.

2. Signs: Bilingualism and Local Branding

– Russian-English hybrids: for example, “*DonPlaza*” (a blend of “*Don*” and the English “*Plaza*”), or “*RostovGrad*” (a play on the historical name “*Nakhichevan-na-Donu*”).

– Traditional names: for example, “*Donskaya Biblioteka*” (rus. *Don Public Library*), where the emphasis is on regional identity.

As we can see, signs in urban spaces reflect both processes of localization (the use of place names) and trends toward globalization (borrowings from English).

3. Slogans: Constructing Urban Identity

– Official: Position the city as a business hub: “*Rostov-on-Don is a city of great opportunities*”.

– Informal: “*Rostov is the capital of the South*”, a popular slogan emphasizing the city’s status.

Slogans serve as a tool for constructing local identity; they shape the image of Rostov-on-Don as a dynamic and significant city.

4. Advertising: Multicultural Coding and the Commercialization of Traditions, Regional Flavor, and Wordplay

An analysis of advertising texts revealed the following trends:

– Use of dialectal expressions and local vocabulary: for example, “*The authentic Don flavor*”. In advertisements for local products, the emphasis is on authenticity. In another example, “*Kuban Milk*” is branding based on regional identity (a reference to a neighboring region).

– Elements of wordplay: “*Rostov is the city where everything tastes great!*” (a pun linking gastronomy and quality of life).

– Hybridization strategies:

Examples of local brands: at the “*Kazachiy Dvor*” café, the advertising slogan “*Вкус Дона в каждом куске!*” (*The taste of the Don in every bite!*) uses dialectal vocabulary (the word “*кусок*” (*bite*) is dialectal). At the “*Nakhichevan Sweets*” store, the advertisement for the product “*Tama – soul of Armenia*” (*Gata is soul of Armenia*) features a combination of Armenian ornamentation and Russian-English text.

Examples of global trends: Anglicisms in shopping mall advertisements: “*Rostov Mall is your crush*” (from the English *crush* with meaning *infatuation*).

Examples of ethnic markers: Ukrainian motifs in advertisements for agricultural products: “*Сало – душі радість!*” (Ukrainian: *Lard is joy of the soul!*).

These and other examples show that advertising exploits ethnic stereotypes as a commercial resource, creating an “*exoticized*” multicultural image of the region. Advertising copy shapes the image of Rostov-on-Don as a city with rich culinary traditions.

5. Local Folklore: Oral Narratives and Digital Mythology

An analysis of oral and digital texts has revealed a diachronic transformation of folklore:

– Traditional forms: proverbs, such as “*Born on the Don, never married*” as an ironic take on bachelorhood. Anecdotes: “*A Cossack in a restaurant: “Charge it to Moscow!”*” as a stereotype of Cossack generosity.

– Digital folklore:

Memes in public groups: “*A woman from Rostov: I’m bringing fish from the market, it’s not for you, it’s for the cat*” (a reference to a love of animals and local humor). Another example is challenges on social media and video-sharing sites: “*Say ‘баз’ instead of ‘дом’, get a Don accent*” (rus. *dom means house*).

It is clear that folklore is evolving from oral narratives to virtual formats, while retaining its role in strengthening the community.

Rostov-on-Don is a blend of languages and cultures that are interconnected yet preserve the linguistic and cultural characteristics of different ethnic groups. At the same time, we can observe the formation and evolution of a specific urban dialect. This dialect is interesting in that it mirrors, like a mirror, the trends in the development of the Russian language within a multi-ethnic society. The city’s dialect is a cultural phenomenon. Its manifestation in a regional form adds to its significance and academic interest.

The linguistic and cultural space of Rostov-on-Don is characterized by: hybridity (traditional and global elements); regionalisms that emphasize local southern identity; and visual mythologization (Cossacks, literary images).

Discussion and Conclusion. The texts of Rostov-on-Don’s urban space form a polyphonic discourse in which historical memory, ethnic diversity, and global trends intersect. The analysis demonstrates that language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for constructing cultural identity in the context of “*glocalization*”.

Linguistic and cultural analysis has confirmed that the texts of Rostov-on-Don’s urban discourse form a unique cultural code that combines local traditions and global trends. Further research could focus on a comparative analysis with other cities in southern Russia (Krasnodar, Volgograd) and on studying residents’ perceptions of urban texts.

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