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Reputationally damaging words in media discourses: How media distort Donald Trump's image

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This article discusses how US and UK liberal media slowly but surely created a skewed representation of 45th US President Donald Trump. Asserting that the media are biased and the images of Donald Trump in print media show political slant of the newspapers, the research analyzes partisan media and image portraying words therein. Usage labels enable identification of the ever-powerful lexical instrument used by the media to create a distorted image of the politician and manipulate the citizens; therefore, the paper aims to analyze evaluative lexical items used in media texts to mould required images of Donald Trump. The research examines the articles on Donald Trump's key activities in early 2020 in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Guardian*, and the *Independent*. The methodological framework includes the data of the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), which is evenly divided between the five genres of spoken discourse, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic journals. Analyzing words in terms of their usage frequency in each of these genres provides a clear picture of the target audience. The *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* provides the most precise and comprehensive classification of the style labels, including “formal”, “informal”, “literary”, “impolite”, “showing disapproval”, “journalism”, and “phrasal verbs”. This combination of the corpus-based approach and the dictionary-based approach resulted from the need to supplement the research with quantitative and qualitative data to study manifestations of political slant in the media holistically. Analyzing image portraying words in the media enables us to describe the key evaluative vocabulary, study Donald Trump's profile and interpretations of his activities in the liberal media, identify political bias and distortion of facts in mass communications, and define new trends in journalism, media-linguistics, and political communication.

Keywords: portrayal, image portraying words, style labels, media bias, mediallynguistics.

Problem setting

Over the recent years the media have significantly evolved. They have become technologically advanced, expanded their coverage, exerted their influence, and acquired the leading role in reporting political issues. Mass communication and politics have always been interconnected, however nowadays media discourse tends to turn politics into the ideological construct to frame political reality and influence the audience [Rusakova, Gribovod 2014: 67]. Language is the key instrument that enables newsmakers to produce politically slanted messages and promote biased opinions. The constant development of media language requires new approaches to media language studies, and one of them — praxiological approach — implies “implementation of speech activity in mass media in terms of efficiency” [Duskaeva 2018: 49].

The media have to be more inventive in having an impact on their audiences and use various language means to achieve efficiency. Although “language tends to be enactive and dynamic for meaning innovation” [Komova, Sharapkova 2017: 102], political media discourse functions not through the meaning of words, but through their illocutionary force [Duskaeva, Krasnova 2014: 56]. Some scholars claim that historically it is the 1970’s when the media started focusing on political leaders and their strategies and tactics in election campaigns using the language of war and competition. Later on, the late 1980’s were marked by an increasing manipulative role of the media as an active participant in political events [Esser et al. 2001: 17]. The modern media inherit this tradition; however, they have become more technologically advanced and equipped.

Recent years have seen increased research interest in partisan media manipulations. Partisan media are defined as “media that not only report the news but offer a distinct point of view on it as well” and “provide viewers with an “echo chamber” of their own beliefs, which may in turn polarize them” [Levendusky 2013: 1]. However, although the role of partisan media “with clear ideological ties to the spread of media populism” [Wettstein et al. 2018: 492] has not been completely analyzed, one thing stays clear: the media, namely news corporations, are losing their key characteristics, objectivity, and offering “opinionated representations and readymade interpretations” instead of news “based on solid factual basis and impartiality” [Dobrosklonskaia 2019: 2]. Hence, in modern media research there has emerged two new concepts that can be considered as synonymous: “fake news” and “post-truth” that aimed at misrepresenting the reality and changing individual and collective values [Koshkarova 2020: 126]. Both concepts denote distribution of irrelevant and distorted information in the media [Koretskaia 2017: 119].

Politicians as one of the main participants of political media discourse “serve further strengthening of the existing political bias” and “are transformed into easily recognizable images” with the help of “fixed, generalized, widespread and simplified representations” provided by the media [Dobrosklonskaia 2019: 8]. As media moguls tend to promote their political and financial interests through their corporations, they can manipulate the audience’s opinions and impose political slant through creating politicians’ distorted images in the news.

Scientific context

News discourse can be viewed through a five-stage information model (fact selection, event interpretation, image creation, stereotype formation, cultural-ideological context) [Dobrosklonskaia 2017: 37]. As all the stages are interconnected, biased opinions can ap-

pear at any level of news making. However, the key instrument of gaining power and manipulating mass consciousness is language through which newsmakers and media tycoons promote political bias in the media texts.

Language means can be used as the instrument of communicative influence of a higher level — of an informational-psychological manipulation, or even an informational-psychological war, due to the existing conflict of parties, interests or ideologies in attempts to win over target audience [Akhrenova, Zaripov 2023: 432]. Some scholars describe the tool of image linguistic modeling to study the most effective strategies the media use in order to establish the trusting relations with the audience, influence social stereotypes by molding images that people can relate to and manipulating their attitudes [Katynskaia 2016; Nesterova 2022].

Recent studies in media language stylistics have seen the blurring of the boundaries between official and unofficial language in media texts [Vinokurova 2016: 306]. Research shows that modern media tend to use stylistically marked words in news texts. This tool can help newsmakers create the politicians' portrayals that meet the political slant of the media. Stylistically marked words have specific labels in dictionaries. Usage labels are viewed by lexicographers as "succinct, customary and repeatedly deployed references to the usage parameters" and reflect "the valence of the words or their features toward certain contexts or contextual effects" [Šipka 2016: 2]. The paper particularly focuses on stylistic labels in dictionaries, not grammatical ones. As distinct from grammatical labels that define words in terms of their word formation potential, stylistic labels allow studying a word's usage in speech, its meaning, and expressive, connotative or evaluative component [Nesova 2006: 14]. The dictionary-based approach is intrinsically linked with the lexicographic method that enables exploration of the semantics and functional features of lexical items through usage labels [Golev 2021: 18, 24].

Usage labels can be classified according to the following criteria: time (*old-fashioned, obsolete, archaic, old use, dated*), place (*British, American, Australian, Irish, etc.*), nationality (*from Latin, from French, from Italian*), medium (*written, spoken*), socio-cultural specificity (*slang, vulgar, taboo*), formality (*formal, informal*), text type (*poetic, literary*), technicality (*computing, journalism, medical, etc.*), frequency (*less frequent, rare*), attitude (*derogatory, offensive, humorous, ironic, euphemistic, showing disapproval, etc.*), normativity (*non-standard, substandard, disputed*) [Vrbinc, Vrbinc 2015: 112–113].

Moreover, scholars divide dictionary labels in terms of connotations of lexical items: expressive connotations (*derogatory, taboo, euphemistic, humorous*), stylistic connotations (*informal, slang, formal, literary, archaic, foreign*) and register markers (*astronomy, economics, judicial, medical*) [Vrbinc, Vrbinc 2017: 96].

In sum, stylistically marked vocabulary can be used in print media to influence the audience and convey politically slanted messages. The vocabulary specifically labeled in dictionaries and used in media texts can serve as reference points for people's perception that are stored in their memory constituting particular images.

Definition of research approaches

The paper examines the image of Donald Trump in the news articles reported by such liberal newspapers as the *New York Times* (8 articles), the *Washington Post* (14 articles), the *Guardian* (11 articles), and the *Independent* (4 articles) from January to March 2020,

the period which triggered a series of reputational risk events for the President [Strelets 2020] and marked the key points of Donald Trump's activities at the close of his first, and only, presidential term, namely the State of Address, the impeachment process, foreign policy in the Middle East, nationwide coronavirus emergency, and 2020 presidential election campaign. The political slant of the chosen newspapers imposes certain expectations on the research results as traditionally the liberal leaning media tend to criticize the Republicans [Shenina 2020: 46].

To analyze the vocabulary that the media use to create Donald Trump's portrayals we processed the data through the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) that provided our research with quantitative and qualitative data¹. The Corpus also enabled us to compare the usage of the most frequent words and collocations across five genres: spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic journals.

For defining the words under analysis, we used the Macmillan dictionary as it provides a precise labeling system (e. g., style and attitude labels, subject labels, and regional labels) and includes words marked as "formal", "informal", "literary", "impolite", "showing disapproval", "very formal", "very informal", "mainly literary", "journalism", "mainly journalism", "phrasal verbs", etc. Several labels ("very formal", "very informal", "mainly literary", "journalism", "mainly journalism") are unique and used in the Macmillan dictionary only. This labeling system can be viewed of real practical use for the research as the paper studies the use of stylistically marked words as an image portraying instrument in print media and analyze them in terms of the corpus-based and dictionary-based approaches. The method of componential analysis allows comparison of the words' meanings and division of lexical items into groups.

Analysis of the materials

Formal words in the media portrayals of Donald Trump

American newspapers tend to point that Donald Trump often feels negative using such formal words as *wrath* ("very great anger") and *hatred* ("a very strong feeling that you dislike someone or something very much")². Both definitions contain the word "very" that intensifies negative image of Trump.

1. *Coats incurred Trump's wrath by issuing unvarnished intelligence assessments that confirmed that Russia had attacked the 2016 election and that Iran was in compliance with the nuclear accord*³.

2. *But it is heartening, three years into Mr. Trump's presidency, to see that society is capable of navigating these rough seas based on collective common sense and despite this president's lies, hatreds and distractions*⁴.

This can be justified. Though Trump's speeches include a lot of positively charged words, they are always against somebody, against real and imaginary enemies; therefore, he himself and his rhetoric are interpreted as belligerent and hostile towards people. One

¹ *Corpus of Contemporary American English*. Retrieved from <https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/>.

² *The Macmillan Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.macmillanenglish.com/ru/dictionary>.

³ *The Washington Post* (2020). February 17.

⁴ *The Washington Post* (2020). March 14.

of the most frequently used words toward Trump is *bellicose* — “someone who is bellicose enjoys fighting or arguing”⁵.

1. *The president issued his initial response on Twitter and struck a less bellicose tone*⁶.

2. *The bellicose threat to target cultural sites is just the latest example of Trump squandering the moral high ground that generations of his predecessors worked to claim, even if they fell short at key moments*⁷.

3. *The shift has been accelerated by Trump, who has scrapped formal White House briefings in favor of a daily stream of boastful, belittling and bellicose tweets*⁸.

4. *Mr. Trump issued bellicose threats to destroy Iran if it retaliated, including cultural treasures in violation of international law, touching off international outrage and forcing his own defense secretary to publicly disavow the threat, saying it would be a war crime*⁹.

According to the COCA, the frequency of use of the word *bellicose* in spoken discourse, magazines, newspapers, and academic articles accounts for 417 examples. This word used to be highly exploited in academic discourse but then it penetrated into media discourse, as newspapers, magazines and TV and radio programmes started to use it, which implies that the media also target people with a considerable educational background.

Since 2016, when Trump was elected President, the word *bellicose* has become more frequently used in newspapers and television news programmes. A slight decrease in its usage in 2018 can be accounted for by minor changes in international relations with Russia and North Korea after Donald Trump had met with the leaders of these countries and by preparations for the 2020 presidential election. Moreover, the COCA search for “bellicose’ collocates with ‘Trump’” in most instances provide “Trump’s bellicose rhetoric”, “Trump’s bellicose tendencies”, and “Trump’s bellicose language”, which implies that Trump’s speeches sound aggressive.

Another word, which is marked in the Macmillan Dictionary as formal, is the verb *berate* — “to talk to someone in an angry way because they have done something wrong”¹⁰.

1. *The president furiously berated Nielsen*¹¹.

2. *Trump is known for his petty cruelty, for berating aides publicly and privately and for presiding over an intentionally gladiatorial West Wing, where advisers seem to expect to be betrayed at some point — and behave accordingly*¹².

3. *The president has berated the Bidens in public remarks and called on China to open an investigation into Hunter Biden’s business activities in that country*¹³.

The COCA includes 1692 examples with this word, showing that it is actively used in magazines and spoken discourse, and less frequently — in academic articles. There is a sharp decline in its usage in radio and TV programmes in 2017–2018, but as for newspapers, after a slight decrease in its usage in 2008 it regained popularity in 2016 when Donald Trump became President. Recent examples of “to berate” + “Trump” collocations in

⁵ *The Macmillan Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.macmillanenglish.com/ru/dictionary>.

⁶ *The Washington Post* (2020). January 8.

⁷ *The Washington Post* (2020). January 8.

⁸ *The Washington Post* (2020). January 10.

⁹ *The New York Times* (2020). January 11.

¹⁰ *The Macmillan Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.macmillanenglish.com/ru/dictionary>.

¹¹ *The Guardian* (2020). January 15.

¹² *The Washington Post* (2020). January 30.

¹³ *The Washington Post* (2020). March 5.

the COCA show that Trump's tendency to dress down people has been often highlighted in spoken discourse.

The words such as *profanity* ("a word or language that is offensive because it is rude, or shows a lack of respect for god or people's religious beliefs"), *sycophancy* ("an insulting word for someone who praises rich or powerful people in order to gain an advantage"), and *hubristic* ("a very proud way of talking or behaving that offends people") are used to describe Trump's negative traits of character and moral qualities¹⁴. The definitions of these words unmistakably exhibit derogatory force.

1. *Unlike other red states, majority-Mormon Utah has long been ill at ease with Trump's crude style, including his xenophobic attacks on refugees and his fondness for profanity*¹⁵.

2. *When Yamiche Alcindor of PBS asked him about the valuable time lost because of that inexplicable decision, Trump bristled at the sound of a voice that dared pierce his cocoon of sycophancy*¹⁶.

3. *But pronouncements of Trump's electoral doom are at best premature. At worst, they are hubristic in a way similar to Trump's own blustering assurance that the US is "totally prepared" for the pandemic*¹⁷.

The next group of examples shows that print media tend to negatively evaluate Donald Trump's actions. The meanings of the words under analysis can be grouped as wrong or not true (*erroneous* — "not correct", *falsehood* — "a statement that is not true"), illegal, immoral, dishonest (*wrongdoing* — "behaviour that is illegal or not moral", *collusion* — "the secret activities of people who work together to do something dishonest"), not reasonable (*imprudent* — "not sensible, especially in relation to the way that money is spent or invested", *self-aggrandizement* — "an increase in power or importance that is not deserved or reasonable", *tenable* — "reasonable and has evidence to support it", often in negatives), stupid, careless, and dangerous (*folly* — "a way of thinking or behaving that is stupid and careless, and likely to have bad results", *imperiling* — "to put someone or something in danger", *misstep* — "a mistake, especially one caused by bad judgement"), and making the situation more difficult or worse (*intractable* — "very difficult or impossible to deal with", *obfuscation* "to deliberately make something confusing or difficult to understand", *exacerbating* — "to make a problem worse")¹⁸.

1. *He also repeated an erroneous claim that the Iraqi was "the head of Hezbollah"*¹⁹.

2. *Trump erroneously believed that Pierson had given the assessment exclusively to rep. Adam B. Schiff (D-Calif.), the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, people familiar with the matter said*²⁰.

3. *It's a dumbfounding notion, especially given Trump's proven propensity for lies and falsehoods*²¹.

4. *Hours before, Speaker Nancy Pelosi had warned that anything short of a full trial with new witnesses and evidence would abet Mr. Trump's attempts to cover up wrongdoing*²².

¹⁴ *The Macmillan Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.macmillanenglish.com/ru/dictionary>.

¹⁵ *The Washington Post* (2020). February 18.

¹⁶ *The New York Times* (2020). March 14.

¹⁷ *The Independent* (2020). March 16.

¹⁸ *The Macmillan Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.macmillanenglish.com/ru/dictionary>.

¹⁹ *The Guardian* (2020). January 18.

²⁰ *The Washington Post* (2020). February 17.

²¹ *The Washington Post* (2020). March 1.

²² *The New York Times* (2020). January 12.

5. *Americans have endured three years of criminal probes of the president for alleged foreign collusion*²³.

6. *Nearly point by point, Madison engaged in the same conduct as Trump — reacting to political opposition with imprudent, improper and reckless behavior*²⁴.

7. *But, as usual, in Trump's desperate need for self-aggrandizement, he oversold*²⁵.

8. *President Trump's long-promised rollback of Obama-era fuel economy standards may not be completed until this summer, and may not be tenable even then*²⁶.

9. *Europe, including Britain, must not follow the folly of President Trump's strategy*²⁷.

10. *Trump's north star was the perpetuation of his own power, even when it meant imperiling the US's shaky democracy*²⁸.

11. *Named after Mr Trump's self-declared intellectual brilliance, the book, excerpts of which have been published by The Washington Post, reveals his litany of missteps and willingness to break long-standing legal and ethical norms since becoming president in 2017*²⁹.

12. *Wednesday's vote, aimed at preventing Mr. Trump from unilaterally plunging the nation into another intractable conflict, underscored how war weary members of Congress — and their constituents — have grown after decades of conflict*³⁰.

13. *So it is galling that two leading Democratic candidates cannot distance themselves further from the Trump-style concealment and obfuscation*³¹.

14. *Donald Trump has raised hackles again after referring to coronavirus as "the Chinese virus", further exacerbating tensions between the US and China over the disease*³².

Also print media focus on Donald Trump's speeches. They tend to point out that Trump can contradict something or someone (*to repudiate*), show a lack of respect towards someone (*to demean, to disdain*), express disapproval of someone (*to castigate*) and dissatisfaction or annoyance about something (*to bemoan*).

1. *Trump has repeatedly repudiated the very concept of American exceptionalism and espoused a variety of moral false equivalency*³³.

2. *Over the course of his presidency, Mr Trump has attacked and demeaned Mr Schiff in over 300 tweets and countless public statements using terms like corrupt, deranged, shifty and "pencil-neck"*³⁴.

3. *Trump's tendency to spin out assertions untethered from reality becomes a recipe for disaster when combined with his disdain for scientists, medical experts, intelligence officials, journalists and others who deal in fact-based reality*³⁵.

4. *In his excellent speech, Trump rightly castigated the Obama administration for providing the Iranian regime with billions of dollars in sanctions relief as part of its nuclear deal*³⁶.

²³ *The Washington Post* (2020). January 15.

²⁴ *The Washington Post* (2020). January 15.

²⁵ *The New York Times* (2020). March 15.

²⁶ *The New York Times* (2020). February 13.

²⁷ *The Guardian* (2020). January 15.

²⁸ *The Guardian* (2020). January 21.

²⁹ *The Independent* (2020). January 16.

³⁰ *The New York Times* (2020). March 11.

³¹ *The Washington Post* (2020). February 22.

³² *The Independent* (2020). March 17.

³³ *The Washington Post* (2020). January 8.

³⁴ *The Independent* (2020). January 15.

³⁵ *The Washington Post* (2020). March 2.

³⁶ *The Washington Post* (2020). January 10.

5. *Before heading back to Washington on Friday, Trump bemoaned that his western road show was coming a close*³⁷.

6. *Trump rails against refrigerators and promises cleaner dishes President bemoans better energy efficiency standards at Milwaukee rally, saying women must wash dishes '10 times*³⁸.

Overall, print media use a wide range of formal words to portray Trump as a politician who often fills his rhetoric with such words as *wrath* and *hatred*. He is typically described as hostile to people and can talk angrily to them, who behaves as an arrogant person, as a toady and blasphemer. His actions are presented by media as wrong, careless, dishonest and dangerous; who often complains and shows little respect toward others.

Informal words in the media portrayals of Donald Trump

Print media pay attention to the political mistakes Donald Trump makes. His actions are described as not properly organized and can do harm using the words *botched* (“badly done or badly planned, and therefore unsuccessful”), *shambolic* (“very badly organized”), *screw-up* (“a situation in which someone makes a big mistake”), and *to trash* (“to damage or destroy something, either deliberately or because you did not take good care of it”)³⁹.

1. *Trump's entirely botched response to the coronavirus pandemic has only intensified this electoral choice*⁴⁰.

2. *At the very time he was bragging about his response and trashing his own citizens, more than 3,000 Americans were dying on the island because of Trump's botched response to the hurricane*⁴¹.

3. *Trump's shambolic, self-interested, head-in-the-sand handling of the crisis has put untold lives at risk*⁴².

4. *Use of this space to critique any more of Trump's coronavirus performance would be a needless repetition of already well-documented screw-ups*⁴³.

5. *At the very time he was bragging about his response and trashing his own citizens, more than 3,000 Americans were dying on the island because of Trump's botched response to the hurricane*⁴⁴.

The COCA includes 1945 examples with the word *botched* and shows that this word is frequently used in newspapers and spoken discourse and very seldom — in academic articles. However, since 2016 its usage frequency in newspapers has decreased, while in popular magazines and TV programmes, on the contrary, it has increased. It can be partially explained by the fact that Donald Trump made electronic media, namely television, the main platform for his presidential campaign.

Print media also use informal words in order to describe the way Trump delivers information, expresses his thoughts, or talks to someone. Therefore, the words *chest-thumping* (“the act or practice of boasting”), *spin* (“a way of presenting information, especially in

³⁷ *The Washington Post* (2020). February 22.

³⁸ *The Guardian* (2020). March 15.

³⁹ *The Macmillan Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.macmillanenglish.com/ru/dictionary>.

⁴⁰ *The Guardian* (2020). March 10.

⁴¹ *The Guardian* (2020). March 13.

⁴² *The Independent* (2020). March 16.

⁴³ *The Washington Post* (2020). March 13.

⁴⁴ *The Guardian* (2020). March 13.

a way that makes something seem good or less bad”), and *to bullshit one’s way* (“to seek an advantage or to create a false impression by saying things that are not true”, also marked as “impolite”) vividly characterize Trump’s linguistic profile.

1. *After some predictable boasting and chest-thumping, Trump laid out what he wants: an end to Iran’s progress toward a nuclear weapon, in exchange for relief from crippling economic sanctions*⁴⁵.

2. *Donald Trump’s contorted spin on the travel restrictions he announced on Wednesday night, including pinning the blame for “a foreign disease” on the European Union, revealed a mind largely driven by politics and not science*⁴⁶.

3. *Sooner or later, however, Trump will realize that he cannot bullshit his way past biology*⁴⁷.

The word *spin* is increasingly widespread in the media: the COCA provides 10,857 examples with this word. Although the noun *spin* is more frequently used in magazines, recent examples of “spin’ collocates with ‘Trump’” show that this word has also been used in newspapers and spoken discourse.

Overall, print media also use informal words portraying Trump negatively. Thus, the examples under analysis create an image of Donald Trump as a dishonest politician, whose reputation can be damaged and whose activities are unsuccessful, badly organized and can lead to serious mistakes. Besides, Trump is portrayed as a boastful man who tends to deliberately distort facts, create false impressions and present the events in a more favorable light.

Phrasal verbs in the media portrayals of Donald Trump

Print media frequently use phrasal verbs in order to describe the way Donald Trump speaks. For instance, *to tip off* (“to give someone a warning”), *to spin out* (“to make something last for a long time, usually longer than is good or necessary”), *to dress down* (“to speak in an angry way to someone who has done something wrong”), and *to lash out* (“to criticize someone or something angrily”)⁴⁸.

1. *Mr. Trump tipped off another hawk, Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina. <...> Mr. Trump issued bellicose threats to destroy Iran touching off international outrage*⁴⁹.

2. *Trump’s tendency to spin out assertions untethered from reality becomes a recipe for disaster when combined with his disdain for scientists, medical experts, intelligence officials, journalists and others who deal in fact-based reality*⁵⁰.

3. *Trump gave Maguire “a dressing-down,” said another individual, who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive matter*⁵¹.

4. *Trump lashed out Wednesday at House Democrats, accusing them of a “Con Job,” as Pelosi was still speaking at the news conference where she named the impeachment managers for the Senate trial*⁵².

⁴⁵ *The Washington Post* (2020). January 9.

⁴⁶ *The Guardian* (2020). March 12.

⁴⁷ *The Guardian* (2020). March 17.

⁴⁸ *The Macmillan Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.macmillanenglish.com/ru/dictionary>.

⁴⁹ *The New York Times* (2020). January 11.

⁵⁰ *The Washington Post* (2020). March 2.

⁵¹ *The Washington Post* (2020). February 17.

⁵² *The Washington Post* (2020). January 15.

5. *Everything about the president — his reliance on his gut instincts in place of expertise, his overwhelming selfishness, and his unfailing tendency to lash out at others when things go wrong — make him the worst person imaginable to hold the world's most powerful job in the face of pandemic*⁵³.

According to the COCA, there are 2425 examples of the use of the verb *to lash out* in print media. This word has gradually become widespread in newspapers, radio and TV programmes and been increasingly used since 2016; however, its use in magazines is at an average level, and it is rarely used in academic discourse.

Besides, the newspapers use phrasal verbs in order to draw people's attention to the notoriously aggressive behaviour of Donald Trump. The examples include *to take out* ("to kill someone"; "to destroy something by attacking it with weapons"), *to face off* ("if people or groups face off, they compete or fight with each other"), and *to take on* ("to fight or compete against someone")⁵⁴.

1. *When the week ended without the war many feared, Mr. Trump boasted that he had taken out an American enemy*⁵⁵.

2. *But the historic clash between his attorneys and the House Democrats charged with presenting the case against him will give Mr Trump a chance to vicariously face off against a longtime nemesis*⁵⁶.

3. *Mr. Trump, who is at his strongest politically when he has a human enemy to attack, has seemed less certain of how to take on an invisible killer*⁵⁷.

Overall, phrasal verbs create an aggressive and intemperate image of Donald Trump. On the one hand, he is a politician who tends to give warnings, to scold, and criticize people. On the other hand, he is portrayed as an aggressor through the verbs with the semantics "to compete", "to fight", "to destroy", "to kill".

The words labeled as "Showing Disapproval", "Journalism", "Literary"

In print media there are numerous examples of use of the words marked as "showing disapproval". The words such as *boastful* ("someone who is boastful often talks proudly about things they have done or can do, or about something they own, especially in order to make other people to admire them"), *self-congratulation* ("showing you are very proud of what you have done, in a way that annoys other people"), and *to brag* ("to talk about your achievements in a proud way that annoys other people") describe the way Donald Trump talks about himself or his activities, which makes a negative impression that he is too proud of himself⁵⁸.

1. *The shift has been accelerated by Trump, who has scrapped formal White House briefings in favor of a daily stream of boastful, belittling and bellicose tweets*⁵⁹.

2. *On the night of March 11, Trump gave an Oval Office address meant to convey seriousness. It included some valuable advice, like the importance of hand-washing. But it also*

⁵³ *The Guardian* (2020). March 12.

⁵⁴ *The Macmillan Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.macmillanenglish.com/ru/dictionary>.

⁵⁵ *The New York Times* (2020). January 11.

⁵⁶ *The New York Times* (2020). January 15.

⁵⁷ *The New York Times* (2020). March 8.

⁵⁸ *The Macmillan Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.macmillanenglish.com/ru/dictionary>.

⁵⁹ *The Washington Post* (2020). January 10.

continued many of the old patterns of self-congratulation, blame-shifting and misinformation⁶⁰.

3. In the next paragraph, Mr. Hewitt quoted Mr. Trump bragging about his unpredictability, a quality Mr. Hewitt praised: "He has created strategic ambiguity around himself"⁶¹.

4. Between diatribes about his possible presidential opponents, Trump bragged about the unemployment rate in South Carolina and nationally, hailing a low jobless rate among African Americans⁶².

5. At the very time he was bragging about his response and trashing his own citizens, more than 3,000 Americans were dying on the island because of Trump's botched response to the hurricane⁶³.

6. On Thursday, as schools shut down and troops took to the streets of a New York suburb, Trump of course bragged about himself in ways that made you wonder about his own medical condition⁶⁴.

7. Trump continues to brag about the relatively low number of diagnosed cases of the virus and deaths from it in America, but that data is corrupted by his incompetence⁶⁵.

According to the COCA, the word *to brag* is actively used in all kinds of discourses, apart from academic articles: the Corpus provides 7105 examples with this verb. Recent years have the highest rates due to the presidency of Donald Trump whose name (along with the names of other American presidents and candidates to American presidents such as Barack Obama, George Bush Jr., Bill Clinton), as the Corpus says, is among the most popular topics and collocations where the verb *to brag* is used. The year 2016 is marked by a rise in the use of the verb *to brag* in newspapers; however, magazines and TV programmes decreased its use.

Print media also have a wide range of words that belong to journalism jargon. These words are marked in the Macmillan Dictionary as "journalism" and "mainly journalism". Such words and phrases as *to lambast* ("to criticize someone severely, especially in a newspaper article or speech"), *under siege* ("being criticized or attacked by a lot of different people at the same time"), and *nemesis* ("someone or something that continues to oppose you and cannot easily be defeated") used in the newspapers make Trump look very belligerent and prone to criticizing⁶⁶.

1. Trump lambasted his then-acting intelligence director, Joseph Maguire, and DNI staff for sharing that information with lawmakers, believing that Democrats would use it to hurt Trump in the election⁶⁷.

2. Yet here in Stockton, a central California crossroads where low wage warehouse workers feel left out of the economic boom and the bustling immigrant community has been under siege by President Trump's crackdown, voters have a different take on Bloomberg's wealth⁶⁸.

3. But the historic clash between his attorneys and the House Democrats charged with presenting the case against him will give Mr Trump a chance to vicariously face off against a longtime nemesis⁶⁹.

⁶⁰ *The New York Times* (2020). March 15.

⁶¹ *The Washington Post* (2020). January 11.

⁶² *The Guardian* (2020). February 28.

⁶³ *The Guardian* (2020). March 13.

⁶⁴ *The Guardian* (2020). March 13.

⁶⁵ *The New York Times* (2020). March 15.

⁶⁶ *The Macmillan Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.macmillanenglish.com/ru/dictionary>.

⁶⁷ *The Washington Post* (2020). February 22.

⁶⁸ *The Washington Post* (2020). February 22.

⁶⁹ *The Independent* (2020). January 15.

However, some words of journalism jargon are derived from medical terms. Thus, the first meaning of the word *virulent* (*virulence*) is marked as “medical”: “a virulent illness is very dangerous and affects people very quickly”⁷⁰. The second meaning of this word is marked as “journalism”: “virulent feelings or actions are extremely strong and angry”⁷¹. Thus, the phrase “virulent rhetoric” acquires specific meaning and implies dangerous and harmful speeches by Trump, while “Trump’s virulence” means that his actions regarding racism are perilous.

1. *Advocates fear Donald Trump has poisoned the process with virulent anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies that have made minority groups distrustful of turning over their information*⁷².

2. *What gave Trump’s racism — as well as his hateful xenophobia, misogyny and jingoism — particular virulence was his capacity to channel the intensifying anger of the white working class into it*⁷³.

3. Also print media use literary words to portray Trump as a politician whose activities are dangerous, dishonest, and ineffective for the country. The examples include *perilous* (“very dangerous”), *dissembling* (“hiding your real thoughts, feelings, or intentions”), and *to spurn* (“to refuse to accept something, do something, deal with something”)⁷⁴.

4. *The story of those seven days, and the secret planning in the months preceding them, ranks as the most perilous chapter so far in President Trump’s three years in office after his decision to launch an audacious strike on Iran, and his attempt through allies and a back channel to keep the ensuing crisis from mushrooming out of control*⁷⁵.

5. *The threat that Bloomberg’s debate performance undermines his image among voters as a potential Trump toppler comes at a perilous time for the campaign, which has concluded in an internal analysis that the window for preventing Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) from winning the nomination or a plurality of delegates is beginning to close*⁷⁶.

6. *Even when cooler heads and bigger brains prevailed, and Trump stopped trying to wish the virus away and started the work of driving it away, he was hapless, dishonest and dissembling*⁷⁷.

7. *Early on, he spurned the expertise of public health officials and thereby squandered the time bought by his travel restrictions*⁷⁸.

According to the COCA, the word *perilous* is not common in academic and spoken discourse as it is marked as “literary” in the dictionary; however, it has been used rather frequently in magazines and newspapers for last twenty years. Though there was an increase in 2013, but since 2016 it has been used less frequently in magazines and newspapers. It can be explained that as the label “literary” means “old but still used in some kinds of creating writing”, it requires specific manner of journalistic narrative, which in recent years has not met modern media standards.

⁷⁰ *The Macmillan Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.macmillanenglish.com/ru/dictionary>.

⁷¹ *The Macmillan Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.macmillanenglish.com/ru/dictionary>.

⁷² *The Guardian* (2020). January 22.

⁷³ *The Guardian* (2020). February 1.

⁷⁴ *The Macmillan Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.macmillanenglish.com/ru/dictionary>.

⁷⁵ *The New York Times* (2020). January 11.

⁷⁶ *The Washington Post* (2020). February 17.

⁷⁷ *The New York Times* (2020). March 15.

⁷⁸ *The Independent* (2020). March 16.

Overall, print media actively use the words that are marked in the Macmillan dictionary as “showing disapproval”, “journalism” and “literary” in order to portray Trump as a boastful and selfish man who is not able to make decisions by himself, who criticizes people a lot, hides the truth and refuses to do the necessary actions. Besides, there is a shift in the meaning of several words that came to the media jargon from medical discourse.

Research results

Donald Trump’s image is biased in American and British quality press. Analyzing the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Independent*, and the *Guardian* shows that these newspapers tend to depict Donald Trump negatively using a wide range of image portraying words specifically labeled in dictionaries as “formal”, “informal”, “phrasal verbs”, “showing disapproval”, “journalism”, and “literary”.

Most of the stylistically marked words under analysis can be considered as emotive and evaluative vocabulary. They can be classified according to the key components of their meanings that evoke emotions and assess Trump’s actions, behaviour or speeches: “bad” (*folly, shambolic, misstep, botched*), “dangerous” (*imperiling, perilous*), “to criticize” — to express disapproval of something or someone (*to castigate, to lash out, under siege, to lambast*), “angry” or “anger” (*wrath, to dress down, to lash out, to berate, virulent*), “to annoy” (*to bemoan, to brag, self-congratulation*), “to disrespect” (*profanity, to demean, to disdain*). Moreover, a few lexical items can be considered as military vocabulary as their definitions include semantics components “to destroy” (*to trash, to take out*) and “to fight” (*to face off, to take on, bellicose*).

Research into image portraying words shows that Trump is depicted as a careless and boastful politician who uses aggressive rhetoric and whose actions are dangerous for the prosperity of the country. The quantitative and qualitative data provided by the COCA verifies the research results: print media tend to use stylistically marked words in order to distort the politician’s portrayal promoting political bias by focusing only on negative assessments of politicians’ activities and behaviours.

Conclusions

At present the search for impartial information is complicated by modern trends in the media that has lost their objectivity in pursuit of their political and financial interests. Language as the subject of numerous linguistic disciplines is considered in media linguistics as an effective tool to create biased portrayals of politicians in the media. Thus, modern media texts are becoming increasingly influential the use of stylistically marked words that can become an instrument of portraying politicians in the media. As images have acquired an important role in the last few decades due to a higher degree of mediatization of politics, politicians’ portrayals are frequently subjected to biased interpretations.

The vocabulary specifically labeled in dictionaries and used in media texts can be considered as the cornerstone of a particular image the media strive to create taking into account the interests of media moguls. In a highly polarized political environment, newsmakers can use expressive and evaluative vocabulary to negatively, or positively, portray politicians in the articles. The media consumers therefore still have to be very skeptical about media texts and bear in mind that the media pursue particular interests, in particular, through the use of specific media language.

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