UDC 81'42

CONCEPTUALIZATION
OF SOUTH-OSSETIA CONFLICT
BY RUSSIAN BLOGGERS

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S.A. Abdramanova. Conceptualization of South Ossetia conflict by Russian bloggers. The present study analyzes the narratives by Russian bloggers on the 2008 South-Ossetia conflict. This analysis of political discourse is underpinned by the principles of cognitive linguistics, developed on the basis of bodily experience of human beings. The combination of different approaches leads to a more comprehensive analysis and concise interpretation of events taking place in society. This cognitive-discursive perspective differs from traditional studies of mass media narratives which mostly base on Discourse Analysis (DA) and/or Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), i.e., language in use is studied from the perspective of meaning on/ above the level of sentences and through the relationship between language and society, as well as language and power. Methodologically, this study was conducted on the basis of integrative speech analysis, critical discourse analysis, and cognitive linguistics. From the cognitive point of view, bloggers' discourse is based on concepts evaluated positively (BENEFIT, FAIRNESS/HONORABLE CASE), negatively (CONQUER, PROBLEM, VANDALISM, NEGOTIATED MATCH), and neutrally (DEMONSTRATION, TEST). From the linguistic point of view, in their discourse, bloggers extensively use metaphors, which belong to the most effective ways of expressing opinions and are widely used by the media to create vivid images of the events described. A qualitative generalization of the data of content analysis proves that the attitude of Russian bloggers to the conflict is quite diverse, there is no consensus about how the war was fought, about its results, about the current situation and future prospects for the region.
Keywords: concepts, conflict, metaphors, Russia, Russian bloggers, South Ossetia.

С.А. Абдраманова. Концептуалізація Південно-Осетинського конфлікту російськими блогерами. У цьому дослідженні аналізовано наративи російських блогерів про конфлікт у Південній Осетії 2008 року. У нашому вивченні дискурсу використано категорії когнітивної лінгвістики, які ґрунтуються на принципах тілесного досвіду людини. Комбінований підхід до дослідження дискурсу блогерів сприяє більш продуманому аналізу й більш точній інтерпретації подій, що відбуваються в суспільстві. Такий підхід відрізняє дане дослідження від традиційного аналізу медійного дискурсу, де в основному використовується аналіз мовлення, і від критичного дискурс-аналізу, тобто дослідження семантики тексту на рівні речення або абзацу та процесів, що відбуваються у суспільстві і пов'язані з мовою та її роллю в соціумі. Методологічно це дослідження проведено на основі інтегративного аналізу мовлення, критичного дискурс-аналізу, а також когнітивної лінгвістики. Виявлено, що з когнітивної точки зору дискурс блогерів базується на концептах, які оцінюються позитивно (ПЕРЕВАГА, ЧЕСНА / БЛАГОРОДНА СПРАВА), негативно (ЗАХОПЛЕННЯ, ПРОБЛЕМА, ВАНДАЛІЗМ, ДОГОВІРНИЙ МАТЧ), або нейтрально (ДЕМОНСТРАЦІЯ, ТЕСТ). З лінгвістичної точки зору в своєму дискурсі блогери використовують велику кількість метафор, які є одним з найбільш ефективних способів вираження думки і широко використовуються засобами масової інформації та їх користувачами для створення яскравих образів описаних подій. Узагальнення даних контент-аналізу показує, що ставлення російських блогерів до конфлікту досить різноманітно, немає єдиної думки про те, як велася війна, про її результати, про нинішню ситуацію і майбутні перспективи для регіону.
Ключові слова: конфлікт, концепти, метафори, Південна Осетія, російські блогери, Росія.

С.А. Абдраманова. Концептуализация Южно-Осетинского конфликта российскими блогерами. В настоящем исследовании анализируются нарративы российских блогеров о конфликте в Южной Осетии 2008 года. В нашем изучении дискурса используются категории когнитивной лингвистики, которые основываются на принципах телесного опыта людей. Комбинированный подход к исследованию дискурса блогеров способствует более продуманному анализу и более точной интерпретации происходящих в обществе событий. Такой подход отличает данное исследование от традиционного анализа медийного дискурса, где в основном используется анализ речи, и от критического дискурс-анализа, т. е. исследования семантики текста на уровне предложения или абзаца, а также процессов, происходящих внутри общества и связанных с языком и его ролью в социуме. Методологически данное исследование проведено на основе интегративного анализа речи, критического дискурс-анализа, а также когнитивной лингвистики. Доказано, что с когнитивной точки зрения дискурс блогеров базируется на концептах, которые оцениваются позитивно (ПРЕИМУЩЕСТВО, ЧЕСТНОЕ / БЛАГОРОДНОЕ ДЕЛО), негативно (ЗАХВАТ, ПРОБЛЕМА, ВАНДАЛИЗМ, ДОГОВОРНЫЙ МАТЧ), либо нейтрально (ДЕМОНСТРАЦИЯ, ТЕСТ). С лингвистической точки зрения в своем дискурсе блогеры используют большое количество метафор, которые являются одним из наиболее эффективных способов выражения мнения и широко используются средствами массовой информации и их пользователями для создания ярких образов описанных событий. Обобщение данных контент-анализа показывает, что отношение российских блогеров к конфликту довольно разнообразно, нет единого мнения о том, как велась война, о ее результатах, о нынешней ситуации и будущих перспективах для региона.

Ключевые слова: конфликт, концепты, метафоры, российские блогеры, Россия, Южная Осетия.

1. Introduction

In August 2008, a conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia turned to a war into which Russia got involved as well. As a result, South Ossetia separated from Georgia and declared itself an independent state. There are contradictory speculations on the issue of who started the war and the role of Russia in it and, accordingly, the Russian army's contribution to the present situation; an ambiguity that accompanies this conflict led to the indefinite status of South Ossetia – it has been recognized only by a few states. This contradiction accounts for the mutual blaming on provocations, which found its place in the mass media of both sides; these blames did not stop until now, ten years after the event.

Mass media and political discourse are considered to be influential actors in society that reflect social reality and influence the general perception of its processes by the readership [Fairclough 2013]. Media discourse is defined as "a public, manufactured, on-record, form of interaction" [O'Keeffe 2012: 441]. If previously media discourse excluded any presence of its consumers, now, due to technological innovations, media have experienced changes in the way that two parties participate in it – the producer(s) of discourse and its audience; in other words, the latter is also engaged in the discourse production. Van Dijk [1988] notes that understanding of the media discourse presupposes the presence of knowledge about the world, which is presented in the form of frames or scripts. It is assumed that the background information given in the oral or written text is familiar to its receptors, though the presence of joint knowledge of the world does not guarantee full understanding because of different interpretation processes and subjective perception of media production.

The present study analyzes the narratives by Russian bloggers on the South-Ossetia conflict in 2008 from the cognitive linguistic perspective. Clifford J. Levy, a correspondent of the New York Times Bureau in Moscow, initiated the discourse on the first anniversary of the event where Russian bloggers were asked to answer four questions on that controversial issue of Russian-Georgian relations, still ambiguously treated by both sides.

The present research aims to find out the dominant concepts and to characterize their verbalization in Russian blogs, i. e., linguistic properties of Russian bloggers' discourse.

2. Theoretical background

In modern linguistics, different approaches are used to analyze mass media narratives [Contemporary critical discourse studies, 2014]. The most widely used methods are Discourse Analysis (DA) and / or Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the methods which study the language in use from the perspective of meaning on / above the level of sentences [Gee & Handford 2012] and through the relationship between language and society and language and power [Wodak 2001]. Political discourse is also investigated from the linguistic-cultural perspective; for example, Blinova [2017] studies the media in Great Britain and emphasizes the importance of national-cultural peculiarities in a political text. In particular, she identifies the most characteristic features of British political discourse related to culture, such as literary allusions, metaphoric images, and idioms.

There are studies that focus on frame and agent categories of discourse. Simons [2006], for example, investigates rhetorical frames on war on terror used by Russian political actors in media discourse. He studies the key means forming the Russian rhetoric which was cast a dominant role in discourse on terrorism that excludes any opposite opinions to the basic propositions. The following rhetorical frames have been identified: the categories of sameness / otherness, of double standards, of diversity / integrity, of unity based on common history and sufferings experienced along that history. Gallagher [2017] underlies the role of narratives in constructing the collective agency:

> "Narrative practices can lead to a collective sense of joint agency (in ways that go beyond simply the sharing of individual mental events); they can help to shape group identity; they can solve problems of stability of intentions and projects across time; they can provide resources for problem solving; and provide ways to track progress toward a goal" [Gallagher 2017: 470].

Sometimes narratives can aim to spread nationalist ideas, as well as the construction of joint agency can lead to the establishment of in- / -out group, i. e., to the development of notions of sameness and otherness. In his analysis of the publications by UK and US newspapers on Palestinian-Israeli war of 2008–009, Amer [2017] identifies two basic social agents and estimates their role in the events depicted. Amer comes to the conclusion that Israeli agency is assigned to have done a bigger contribution to a ceasefire than Hamas actors; according to him, this uneven representation of roles of agents involved is grounded in the bias of Western mass media.

The Conceptual Metaphor Theory elaborated by Lakoff and Johnson [1980] gave a new perspective to discourse research. Scholars started to study the language from the point of view of cognitive linguistics, i. e., the meaning of mass media production is researched through categories developed on the basis of bodily experience of human beings [Langacker 1991; Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Talmy 2000]. Van Dijk [1997; 1998] believes that ideologies are mentally and internally embodied by the values, opinions, and knowledge shared in the society and the experiences of its representatives. Foremost, he acknowledges the existence of conflicting representation of SELF / US and OTHERS / THEM, where the former are good ones and the latter are bad. The cognitive models serve as tools of comprehending and interpreting news, or talk, or speech more or less consciously; a hierarchically organized network of mental models form a fixed schemata which are then recalled by memory in cases of necessity. The examples of such models are the following categories: Setting, Social circumstances, Institutional environment, Participants, etc.

In most researches on media discourse, cognitive linguists focus on conceptual metaphors, their functions and role as well as the concepts that stand behind different events covered by mass media. Gibbs [1989] investigates the notion of terrorism and defines its concept in terms of "strict causation, selective survival, and purposiveness" [Gibbs 1989: 339]. Having considered the mechanisms of a terrorist act and its social nature, he comes to the logical conclusion that TERRORISM can be conceptualized as CONTROL. Zhabotynska [2016] analyzes the speeches by Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin in the period of 2014–2015 and elaborates the conceptual

metaphors typical to their political discourse. She bases her research on the analysis of metaphorical expressions, target and source conceptual domains, and finds similarities and differences in the way the presidents refer to their countries, economy, and politics. Thus, she comes to the conclusion that metaphoric systems of their discourse reflect their worldview, ideology, and the aim to be pursued to impact their audiences. Shchipitsina [2006] compares the usage of metaphors in Russian and German mass media while their describing events in Russia. By applying quantitative analysis she found out that the most used source domains were SOCIAL LIFE, HUMAN BEING, PHYSICAL OBJECTS and ACTIONS, NATURE, SPACE, and ARTIFACTS. Specifically she notes a wide usage of VIOLENCE metaphor, within the SOCIAL LIFE domain, by mass media of both countries, with a slight difference in connotation. Both countries' media referred VIOLENCE to a critical notion, though in Russian media there were examples of positive description of events related to the struggle against oligarchs. Holmgreen [2008] investigates metaphorical constructions in Danish media discourse on biotechnology, which appears to be a controversial issue in the society. She underlines the functions that metaphors play in media discourse – they assist in explaining the topic and persuading the audience in a certain viewpoint.

Thus, a review of publications, given above, shows that a combination of traditionally applied methods of research and new approaches bring to a comprehensive and diverse study of mass media. The present research seeks to reveal the way South Ossetia conflict is conceptualized by Russian bloggers from the cognitive linguistics perspective with few elements of discourse analysis.

3. Methodology and material

The object of the present research is 92 narratives produced by Russian bloggers at the request of Clifford J. Levy (the New York Times Bureau in Moscow), who asked them to answer the following four questions on the South Ossetia events the year after the conflict, in 2009:

1. Do you agree with the opinion, expressed by President Medvedev and other Russian authorities, that Georgia executed an act of genocide towards people of South Ossetia?
2. What more has that operation brought to Russia – success or problems, both inside the country and on the international arena?
3. What do you think if the situation in the Caucasus has become more stable, or there is possibility of a new conflict?
4. According to you, what are the perspectives for recognition of independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by the world community?

The answers to those questions were analyzed to reach the aims of the research, mainly I aim:

- To determine the attitude of Russian bloggers to the conflict;
- To find out the linguistic peculiarities of the language of the Russian bloggers on the controversial issue of South Ossetia conflict, still ambiguously treated by different sides;
- To reveal concepts implied from the narratives of Russian bloggers on the conflict.

The qualitative data analysis has been underpinned by methodologies applied in Discourse Analysis, CDA and by the Conceptual Metaphor theory in cognitive linguistics, i.e. content analysis, frame semantics, and conceptual semantics analysis. A combination of methods has been utilized to reach the aims of the research. Such combination of methodologies allows investigating a discourse comprehensively and multifariously [Dirven, Frank & Putz 2003; Hart 2015; Hart & Lukes 2010; Van Dijk 1997]: "Cognitive Linguistics offers CDA the 'missing link' … it needs to explain the relationship between discursive and social practices. At the same time, CDA offers Cognitive Linguistics the opportunity to extend its analyses beyond linguistic and conceptual structure to include the constraints that these place on societal structure" [Hart 2015: 323]. The analysis of discourse narratives revealed an application of different linguistic means that conceptualize the issue under question.

4. Results and discussion

The context structure elaborated from the narratives of Russian bloggers is rather diverse. There are few Agents that participate in the scenery: some of them play a bigger role in the scenario and others fulfil the role of secondary actors. The major ones are Russia and the USA; each of them is considered to have contributed to the existing situation in the region. Other entities, such as South Ossetia, Georgia, and the Caucasus, play the minor role, and they are dependent on the rule of world powers. Also, the world community is involved, and its composition is not homogenous – it is comprised of West and Western bloggers, Eastern Europe (former socialist countries), and organizations, e.g. Human Rights Watch (*уроды из Хьюман Райт Воч* [urody iz x'jumanrajtvoĉ] 'freaks from Human Rights Watch'). Bloggers that call themselves 'patriots of Russia' assigned their country a certain status of 'a chief in the region' (*старший на районе* [staršyj na rajone]) and its citizens a label of 'decent people' (*порядочные люди* [porjadočnye ljudi]).

The USA has received a negative assessment; it is positioned as 'a world judge and policeman in one person', and it is resumed that for the US it is time 'to stop poking its nose into anything':

(1) *проворовавшиеся США [provorovavŝijesja sša]* 'stealing/ falsifying USA'.
(2) *пиндосское рыло [pindosskje rylo]* 'pindos snout'.

There are several versions of the etymology of the term 'pindos'. The most plausible explanation is that it originates from the Greek language: it is the name of the Pind ridge. It served as a self-name for Black Sea Greeks; then, Russians in the south of Russia used the word as a nickname for local Greeks. Greeks were associated with penguins for their short height and black hair. In the 90s in former Yugoslavia, Russian blue helmets transferred the term to American soldiers whose walk in their ammunition reminded them of penguins' walk. Later this pejorative term has spread to all American citizens and to the country as a whole (Pindostan, Pindossia).

The world community and mostly its Western part received a negative evaluation for their denunciation of Russia's intrusion into the territory of Georgia. Western states are blamed for their hypocrisy *(строит из себя целку* [stroit iz sebja tselku] 'builds a whole/ a virgin of itself'), for their dependence on the US (*когда страны станут думать своим умом, а не смотреть в рот Штатам* [kogda strany stanut dumat' svoim umom a ne smotret' v rot ŝtatam] 'when will countries start thinking by themselves and not look at the mouth of the States'):

(3) *лживая, лицемерная, т.е. западная часть [lživaja ličemernaja, t.e. zapadnaja čast']* 'lying, hypocritical, i.e. Western part'.
(4) *кровожадные лохи [krovožadnye loxi]* 'bloodthirsty fuckers'.
(5) *это же проститутки [eto že prostitutki]* 'these are prostitutes'.

South Ossetia is assigned a passive and dependent role of a victim of 'Saaki's dictatorship in Georgia' (*диктатура Сааки* [diktatura saaki]), which is not able to be independent (*неспособна самостоятельно существовать* [nesposobna samostojatel'no suŝestvovat'] 'unable to exist independently'). For Russians, South Ossetia is seen, first, as a loose change in political game and, second, as a burden to Russia:

(6) *взяты сегодня в заложники [vzjaty segodnja v založniki]* 'are taken now as hostage'.
(7) *обуза в лице Южной Осетии [obuza v lice južnoj ossetii]* 'a burden in the face of South Ossetia'.

The Caucasus, on the whole, is perceived as 'a part of Russia' (*часть России* [čast' rossii]) and, at the same time, as 'a headache for Russia' (*головная боль для России* [golovnaja bol' dlja rossii]) due to the presence in that region various interests from different sides, particularly NATO and the

USA. One of bloggers expresses a concern for the people of Georgia, Abkhasia and South Ossetia who, according to him, find themselves 'between a hammer and an anvil' (*между молотом и наковальней* [meždu molotom i nakoval'nej]) because of contradictions within world powers.

Georgia is labled as 'States' clients' (*штатовские клиенты из Грузии* [štatovskie klienty iz gruzii]; one of bloggers claims that the conflict in South Ossetia started after the visit of Condoleezza Rice to Georgia. Georgians are also positioned as:

(8) *пиндостанские прихвостни [pindostanskije prixvostni]* 'Pindostan's henchmen'.

(9) *разменная монета в этой игре [razmennaja moneta v etoj igre]* 'a small coin in this game'.

There were mentioned some personages in the narratives of Russian bloggers, such as Medvedev, Putin, Lukashenko, Kokojty, Rice, and even Hitler, but Saakashvili received the most articulation in the narratives. Ironically, he was claimed to be 'a beacon' of democracy' (*"маяк" демократии* [majak demokratii]), but actually he is percieved as a traitor to his own people (*просто предатель своего грузинского народа, который ведет его на заклание в этом довольно грязном конфликте глобальных держав* [prosto predatel' svoego gruzinskogo naroda kotoryj vedět ego na zaklanije] 'just a traitor of his Georgian people, who leads them to slaughter in this rather dirty conflict of global powers') acting in the interests of the United States (*оранжевый ставленник США* [oranževyj stavlennik sša] 'an orange henchman of the US'). Consequently, he is seen as a threat to Russia's security – *нашим верхам он как кость в горле* [našim verxam on kak kost' v gorle] 'he is like a bone in the throat for our top'. Saakashvili is also associated with Hitler due to embedded image of him as the Fuhrer in people's minds by Russia's mass media:

(10) *грузинский фюрер [gruzinskij fjurer]* 'the Georgian Fuhrer'.

(11) *подшефный фюрер [podšefnyj fjurer]* 'the sponsored Fuhrer'.

Same / Other

The analysis of narratives revealed the existence of ideology of Us and Them, the ideology that "seems to be polarized – We are Good and They are Bad – especially when conflicting interests are involved" [Van Dijk 1998: 25]. There are few models of conflicting interests involved: Russian bloggers have different attitudes to each other and to their peers from other countries, and they also oppose Russia to the remaining world, at least to the part unfriendly to Russia. There is no unity among Russian bloggers themselves – those who oppose to official interpretation of events are named as:

(12) *неумные люди [neumnye ljudi]* 'unintelligent people'.

(13) *программируемые люди из "демократического" лагеря граждан России" [programmirujemye ljudi iz demokratičeskogo lagerja graždan]* 'programmable people from the 'democratic' camp of citizens of Russia'.

And their opponents, vice versa, classify those who believe in the truthfulness of an official claim as:

(14) *"жертва путиновизора" [žertva putinovizora]* 'a victim of Putin's TV'.

It is natural to observe different approaches as a reaction to such controversial issue as South Ossetia events; that illustrates non-homogeneity of the Russian society, and even polarity among its citizens.

Another pair of opposition by Russian bloggers is created towards bloggers of other countries – in case of their identification, 'the others' are instantly pushed out of the discourse:

(15) *хрен ли вы тут забыли [xren li vy tut zabyli] 'horseradish, what you forgot here'.*
(16) *идите своей дорогой [idite svoej dorogoj] 'walk your own way'.*

Finally, Russian bloggers place Russia in opposition to the World community, especially to those countries which did not support the proclamation of independence by South Ossetia:

(17) *мы, к счастью, являемся патриотами России, поэтому безоговорочно одобряем все ее действия на международной арене. А кто не с нами, тот, как известно, против нас [my k sčast'ju yavlyaemsya patriotami rossii poetomu bezogoročno odobryaem vse ee dejstviya na mejdunarodnoj arene a kto ne s nami tot kak izvestno protiv nas] luckily, we are patriots of Russia, that is why we approve all its actions on the international arena. And those who are not with us, they are against us.*

(18) *наши прекратили войну [naši prekratili vojnu] our folks stopped the war (about the conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia).*

(19) *мы своих не бросаем [my svoix ne brosayem] 'we don't throw our folks' (about South Ossetians).*

Such attitude to opponents and intolerance to contrasting opinions originated from the time of the October revolution when the socialist Russia found itself in isolation among the hostile to it bourgeois world; at that time a slogan 'Who is not with us – is against us' has been developed to unite people in their struggle for independence of the state. The present propagandists continue to lead this line, which obtained exaggerated forms by present.

The scenarios and frames that have been developed in Russian bloggers' narratives mostly relate to the place of Russia in the world and its relationship with the Caucasus, in particular. First of all, bloggers fairly consider that *the first obligation of any state is to protect its citizens no matter which territory they are on;* moreover, the function of Russia is *to defend its citizens and its allies* because, as they think, it is a country of *decent people.* In this case, South Ossetia is positioned as an ally of Russia which needs protective support:

(20) *русских теперь как родных любят [russkix teper' kak rodnyx l'they like Russians like their loved ones' (about South Ossetians).*

By those defensive actions, the country earns a reputation of the power that *is able to give an adequate response*, and, of course, it deserves respect of its citizens because *people saw that the state defends them*:

(21) *народ страны сплотился в единое целое [narod strany splotilsja v edinoje čeloje] 'the people of the country rallied together' (about Russia).*

Another message, which bloggers persistently forwarded, was the revival of Russia and its growing role in the world; lastly, Russia *returned to the level of world power*, and other countries should reckon with it. That message correlates with the idea of Russia's 'getting up off its knees' after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which was widely utilized by Kremlin propagandists.

The frames and scenario of Russia's relationship with the Caucasus are not homogeneous. On the one side, Caucasus is *a part of Russia.* The history of their 'cohabitation' is long enough; it goes back to tsarist Russia, and *joining the USSR was a boom.* On the other hand, the Caucasus is *a headache for Russia* because Caucasian republics act in their own interests and *each pulls the blanket to its side*; so, *Caucasus helps Russia to be on alert and not relax.* Those comments, of course, refer to the complex relations between Russia and Chechnya, both sides experienced two

wars in modern history with a big number of casualties and huge destruction on the territory of Chechnya, which, consequently, brought changes to the whole structure of the republic aiming to prevent any attempt at its independence from Russia. The latest tension between Chechnya and Ingushetia reasoned by land claims of Ramzan Kadyrov adds complexity to the situation in the Caucasus; and Russia truly cannot 'relax' in such circumstances.

The role of Conceptual Metaphor Theory in the analysis of discourse has been mentioned above; studies documented numerous examples of application of metaphors for communicative purposes. Scholars note that the choice and function of metaphors in discourse depend on different factors, such as metaphors' embodied meaning, individual and cultural background, and the purposes of interaction, i. e. both cognitive and pragmatic aspects are considered [Holmgreen 2008]. Russian bloggers in their narratives widely utilized metaphors forming a comprehensive picture of their understanding of South Ossetia events. Those metaphors mostly refer to the spheres of politics and media; Politics is conceptualized as A BIG GAME (*крупная игра* [krupnaya igra [krupnaya igra] 'a big game'); A THEATRE and A STAGE (играть двойные стандарты [igrat' dvojnye standarty] 'to play with / to act double standards'; *но в принципе это никакой рояли не играет* [no v prinčipe eto nikakoj royali ne igrayet] 'but in principle it does not play any grand piano'.

Western journalists are accused of 'lies, forgery, and unforgivable mistakes'; their media are 'supposed to be free and independent' (*якобы свободные и независимые* [jakoby svobodnye i nezavisimye) – they 'began to brainwash Western common people by propaganda' (*начали промывать мозги западному обывателю пропагандой* [načali promyvat' mozgi zapadnomu obyvatelju]) and to 'distort data about the war' (*коверкать данные о войне* [koverkat' dannye o vojne). Russian media are also blamed of the distortion of facts by those who do not agree with the official interpretation of South Ossetia conflict (one of such opinions is expressed by a Ukrainian blogger):

(22) *запредельная ложь* 'outrageous lie'.
(23) *дешевая кремляндская пропаганда* 'cheap Kremlin (land) propaganda'.
(24) *зомбоящик* 'zombie player/ box'.

One of bloggers sums up that both sides have their own truth, and each 'turns it out in its own way' (*и выворачивает ее каждый по-своему* [i vyvoračivajet eë kajdyj po-svoemu).

The opponents to Russia are associated with A DOG which barks pointlessly and ineffectually:

(25) *лаять и хаять – пусть лают [lajat' I xajat' – pust' lajut]* 'scold and bark – let them bark' (about Georgians).
(26) *самый большой лай слышался с их стороны [samyj bol'šoj laj slyšalsja s ix storony]* 'the biggest barking was heard from their side' (about Eastern Europe).
(27) *кто поднимает хвост и начинает гавкать [kto podnimaet xvost I načinaet gavkat'* 'those who raise their tails and starts barking'.

A certain breed is attached to Saakashvili – he is associated with a sassy pug, a small dog which is absolutely harmless – it barks, but everybody ignores it (*этой нахальной моське дали подзатыльник, чтоб знала свое место* [etoj naxal'noj mos'ke dali podzatyl'nik čtob znala svoë mesto] 'this sassy pug was given a squad for it to know its place'). Involuntarily, a reader recollects the fable by Krylov "An elephant and a pug" where the pug considers itself to be scary because it barks at the elephant. Saakashvili is not perceived as a powerful, or even an equal rival; he is supported by Western powers, especially the US, but whatever support is, if he attempts to return

South Ossetia, he will be resolutely repulsed (*если полезет кусаться, то ее пнут под хвост еще раз* [esli polezet kusat'sja to eё pnut pod xvost eše raz] 'if the dog bites, it will be kicked again').

A reference to a dog can be explained by the conceptualization of DOG in the Russian language. According to Marugina [2009], the concept of DOG has both positive and negative connotation. Though it is generally considered to be 'a friend' to a human being, it is never forgotten that it is a representative of the animal world. A dog's barking corresponds to its aggressiveness, alertness, and fear, but very often a dog barks without any reason, in this case it is associated with slander, idle talk, lies, and rumors. A bark of a small dog doubles this perception because of the false notion that the size can be compensated by the loudness. Of course, the symbol of a pug in relation to Saakashvili is deliberately attached to him to humiliate him and express their contempt. Interestingly, he is also compared to a Teddy bear due to his first name (*дегенеративно-плюшевый противник* [degenerativno-pljuševyj protivnik] 'a degenerate-plush enemy'): in Russian fairy tales and folklore the bear is traditionally named as 'Mikhail Potapovich' (a respectful version) or 'Mishka' (in familiarity). In relation to Saakashvili all labels attached to him bear a sarcastic-ironical character as a result of the Kremlin propaganda where he was not seriously treated as a president of the sovereign state; some traits of his character also contributed to imaging him as an impulsive, inadequate, and unstable personality.

It is well known that Medvedev blamed Georgia of conducting an act of genocide towards South Ossetians. The majority of bloggers agreed with that proposition, some of them stated that it could be genocide if Russia did not stop Georgia. Another group of bloggers named the conflict as an act of aggression towards South Ossetia by Georgians, and only a few bloggers expressed their disagreement and insisted that it was a military operation by Russia aimed at the seizure of the territory of the sovereign state. Below Table 1 shows the domains of source and target Russian bloggers utilized to conceptualize the conflict.

Table 1

Cognitive metaphors of Russian-South Ossetia conflict

Target domain / concept	Example	Source domain
BENEFIT	*На руку России* *Расширяет границы своей империи*	BARGAIN
HONORABLE COURSE / FAIRNESS	*Справедливая война* *Россия защищала другой народ другой страны*	EQUITY
DEMONSTRATION	*Демонстрация национальной мощи и силы России*	SHOW
NEGOTIATED MATCH	*Договорной матч*	SPORT
VANDALISM	*Беззаконие, отсутствие ясных причин*	DISORDER
COMMOTION / STIR / KNOT	*Узел, который политики запутали языками.* *Заварушку начала ни Грузия, ни Россия, заварушка началась после визита Кондолизы Райс*	PROBLEM
TEST	*Это была проба со стороны США – ответят или проглотят*	CONTROL
CONQUER	*Военная операция по захвату спорных территорий*	WAR

As the table reveals, the South Ossetia conflict does not have a homogeneous evaluation by Russian bloggers; their interpretation of the event has a positive, negative, and neutral connotation. The domains of source have a wide range of application, such as sport, trial, examination, and war, but,

on the whole, they all form a general understanding of the perception of the conflict by Russian people, which, I assume, have not much changed since 2009.

5. Conclusions

The present study analyzed the narratives by Russian bloggers on the 2008 South-Ossetia conflict from the cognitive linguistics perspective. The qualitative analysis has been applied to learn the opinions of bloggers and identify the concepts and categories, which they operated with. The analysis revealed that bloggers used a big amount of metaphors; the most widely used one is an association to a dog, which barks but does not scare anybody. The issues of sameness and otherness have been identified; US are considered to be 'decent and smart', THEY – to be 'unintelligent and programmable'. There were also determined the categories applied, such as Actors, Frames, and Scenarios: the media were blamed to be biased and misleading; politicians – to be applying double standards. The basic messages that were forwarded by majority of bloggers was a relief of Russia's returning to the level of world powers and satisfaction with the actions of their government in a fair war for defending Russia's allies. To sum it all up, I claim that:

1. The attitude of Russian bloggers to the conflict is quite diverse. There is no homogeneous opinion on the way the war was conducted, on its outcomes, current situation and future perspectives for the region.
2. Different linguistic means have been utilized to convey the message on the conflict; they are metaphors, genres, and expressive language tools.
3. The conflict was conceptualized both positively (BENEFIT, FAIRNESS / HONORABLE CASE) and negatively (CONQUER, PROBLEM, VANDALISM, NEGOTIATED MATCH), as well as neutrally (DEMONSTRATION, TEST).

These findings show that the linguistic means of conceptualizing and categorizing the world can provide a deeper insight into the object of research and give additional frame to the meaning of narratives. Though South-Ossetia conflict has lost its actuality at present, it would be interesting to research Russian bloggers' discourse related to the events in Ukraine, to learn if there are any similarities or differences with the 2009 discourse, and to see how categories and concepts of war have changed after ten years of events under question.

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