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**Liudmyla Hryzhak**

PhD, Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University,

e-mail: [l.hryzhak@chnu.edu.ua](mailto:l.hryzhak@chnu.edu.ua); ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9485-778X>;

GOOGLE SCHOLAR: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=4eLWx9sAAAAJ>;

RESEARCH GATE: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Liudmyla-Hryzhak>

## ADJECTIVAL CHARACTERISATION OF UKRAINE IN THE ENGLISH WEB 2021 (enTenTen21) CORPUS

The study explores adjectival characterisation of *Ukraine* in the English Web 2021 (enTenTen21) corpus. Functioning as noun modifiers, adjectives qualify referents, describing and evaluating them, thus shaping the perspective through which they are viewed and assessed. The aim of this study is to investigate the image of *Ukraine* created through such modification, and its relevance lies in the fact that the analysed corpus was created before the full-scale Russian assault on *Ukraine*.

Adjectives collocating with the lemma *Ukraine* are identified, analysed and organised into several thematic domains based on their semantics and contextual use: territory and climate, eras and timeframes, politics and geopolitics, features and perceptions, economic state, war and conflict, society and identity. The findings show a complex and ambivalent portrayal of the country, with the majority of modifiers characterising *Ukraine's* territorial divisions, historical development, current geopolitical status and sovereignty, and evaluatively depicting its positive and negative qualities. Frequent references to the Soviet past, Russia's occupation and annexation of Crimea, and the ongoing war in the east highlight the challenges faced by *Ukraine* in establishing itself as a sovereign and unified state on the global stage. Negative portrayals, often amplified by Russian disinformation, depict *Ukraine* as unstable, controlled, or corrupt, whereas positive descriptors emphasise its modernity, independence, resilience, unity, and aspirations for European integration.

Overall, the adjectival representation of *Ukraine* in the analysed online discourse constructs a complex and ideologically charged image of the country, marked by polarisation between depictions of its strength and vulnerability, unity and fragmentation, a tumultuous historical past alongside a future-oriented European trajectory. These findings show how language reflects and shapes perceptions of *Ukraine* in contemporary English-language online discourse.

**Key words:** *adjective, corpus, image, modification, Ukraine.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The object of the study is the lemma 'Ukraine' in the English Web 2021 (enTenTen21) corpus, and the subject is adjectival modifiers (attributive and predicative) collocating with *Ukraine* and their role in construing the country's image in contemporary English-language online discourse, manifested in the diverse dimensions of its portrayal. The relevance of the research lies in the fact that the analysed corpus is the most recent version of the enTenTen family, consisting of 52 billion words, and was "downloaded in October–December 2021 and January 2022" [13], that is, just before the full-scale Russian invasion. At that time, the country's territorial integrity had already been undermined by the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and by ongoing fighting with Russian-backed separatists along its eastern border, and the country was facing an escalation of Russia's aggression, which eventually led to Russia's assault. Those events are represented in the analysed corpus and contribute to the country's overall image. In a newer version of the enTenTen family corpus, the online discourse may foreground war-related representations much more strongly and thus produce a different image of Ukraine.

Adjectives play a central role in description and evaluation among the four main classes of lexical words identified by grammarians [1, p. 55]. Most typically, they "describe qualities of people, things, and states of affairs" [ibid., p. 64], but, many adjectives also function as classifiers, delimiting or restricting "a noun's referent, by placing it in a category in relation to other referents" [ibid., p. 508]. Collocating with nouns, adjectives function as modifiers, that is, they "add 'descriptive' information to the head, often restricting the reference of the head" [10, p. 65]. These grammatical features of adjectives allow us not only to explore how they describe Ukraine in the English online web corpus but also to differentiate the categories they relate to in shaping the general image of the country.

Ukraine has established its reputation and image on the world stage as an independent state since 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Sukhorolskyi and Sukhorolska claim that "[i]n the early 2000s, Ukraine was known in the world primarily in connection with Chernobyl, famous athletes, and the Orange Revolution," and that "Russia's strategy has always been aimed at preventing the shaping of the image of Ukraine as a capable state" [14, p. 279].

Boulding defines image as "the total cognitive, affective, and evaluative structure of the behavior unit, or its internal view of itself and its universe" [2, p. 120]. In the context of this research, the behaviour unit refers to a country and its nation, and the linguistic construction of a country's image is understood as a complex process that integrates lexical choices, ideological stances, and socio-political contexts. These aspects interact with each other to produce a picture of the country that is heavily dependent on ideological, social and political

perspectives. Simpson observes that "as an integrated form of social behaviour, language will be inevitably and inextricably tied up with the socio-political context in which it functions," and that, operating within this social dimension, it must "of necessity reflect, and some would argue, construct ideology" [12, p. 6]. This leads to the assumption that the linguistic means used to characterise a country play a significant role in shaping its public image, not only reflecting ideologies embedded in portrayal but also producing ideological meanings and propagating opinions in the online discourse.

The term 'country image' has been studied across many disciplines. For instance, the influence of a country's image on its attractiveness to foreigners as a travel destination is examined in tourism studies [11; 18.]. In marketing and management, scholars compare and contrast the concepts 'country image' and 'brand' [4; 5]. Lee [7] examines Ukraine's country image and its cultivation strategies over three decades, from independence in 1991 to 2022, within the context of international public relations and public diplomacy.

The issue of a country's image has also been addressed in linguistic research; however, it remains underexplored in the literature, as existing studies have not comprehensively explained the role of language in framing a country's image. For example, Liu et al. [8] analyse national image from the perspective of the Appraisal Theory, focusing on the Attitude system. Pliasun [9] studies Ukraine's image-building through the lens of linguistic imageology, focusing on how linguistic and extralinguistic markers contribute to the construction of a positive national image in media discourse. Tkachenko et al. [16] explore the media image of Ukraine and argue that it is primarily constructed around the country's political image. Chen et al. [3] use aspect-based sentiment analysis of a Twitter dataset to investigate how China's image changed during COVID-19. My research aims to advance linguistic studies in this field by analysing how language constructs and promotes a country's image in online discourse.

Following Tarasheva, the term *image* is regarded in the study as synonymous with the term *representation*, "although the case can be made that an image is the result of representations" [15, p. 6]. Several terms and their derivatives are employed in this research interchangeably to refer to the way in which Ukraine is presented in the corpus, such as *characterise*, *describe*, and *portray*.

## 2. RESEARCH

Methodology combines corpus-based techniques with the qualitative examination of the findings. The Advanced search in the Word Sketch tool of SketchEngine for 'Ukraine' generates a one-page summary of its collocates, presenting a word's grammatical and collocational behaviour [6]. From this summary, the two Word Sketch columns labelled *modifiers of "Ukraine"* and *adjective predicates of "Ukraine"* were selected for

further analysis. The concordance lines in both columns were then expanded, and each line was subsequently extended to a broader context for the manual analysis of the adjectives relating to Ukraine, in order to determine their contextual meanings and evaluative stances (see Figure 1).

The attributive and predicative adjectives were then grouped into several thematic domains based on their semantics and contextual use, thereby allowing the identification of prevailing narratives and discursive patterns in the construction of the image of Ukraine in the analysed English-language online discourse. Occurrences were counted as tokens of each adjectival modifier in the concordance output, with identical concordance lines (i.e., the same wording repeated) counted once per unique concordance context. Adjectives were assigned to thematic domains on the basis of their semantic contribution in context (see Table 1), with concordance lines used to disambiguate polysemous items and to justify their assignment to the appropriate domains. For example, when the adjective *poor* referred to the country's economic state, it was included in the *Economic state* domain, and when it was used as an emotive descriptor, implying sympathy, it was assigned to the *Features and perceptions* domains. A few other examples include: *stable/unstable*, which may describe either governance or the economy; *close* – referring to geographical proximity or diplomatic openness, and *central* – denoting location or importance. What follows is an explication of the research findings with the indication of the number of occurrences of the most common adjectives in each domain collocating with the lemma 'Ukraine'.

### 3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The lemma 'Ukraine' occurs 992,812 times in the examined English Web 2021 (enTenTen21) corpus. The manual examination of concordance lines of the two Word Sketch columns reveals that 72,657 attributive

and predicative adjectives that modify this lemma in the corpus. Collectively, these adjectives do more than describe Ukraine: they shape how the nation is conceptualised, presented, remembered, and imagined. They capture not only what Ukraine is, but what it might be or should become. The examination of the semantic and contextual meanings of the adjectives enabled their organisation into several thematic groups or domains (see Table 1), based on the particular aspects of Ukraine they characterise.

Table 1

**Thematic domains of adjectives modifying lemma 'Ukraine' in the English web 2021 (enTenTen21) corpus**

Thematic domains	Adjectives	Percentage
Territory and climate	52185	72%
Eras and timeframes	8371	12%
Politics and geopolitics	5364	7%
Features and perceptions	3808	5%
War and conflict	1169	2%
Economic state	1058	1%
Society and identity	702	1%

For reasons of space, the descriptions of each domain below do not exemplify all the adjectives identified, but focus on the most frequent and semantically salient ones in each domain.

The largest group includes adjectives describing the country's **Territory and climate**, with the most frequent references to the *eastern* part of Ukraine (*east/central/southern/E*) – 29,116. The prevalence of these modifiers in the corpus is largely attributed to the warfare involving Russian-backed separatists and Ukrainian military forces in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions that began in 2014. The downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 by a Russian-supplied missile over eastern Ukraine is also frequently mentioned in the corpus, underscoring

The screenshot displays a concordance tool interface for the lemma 'Ukraine' in the English Web 2021 (enTenTen21) corpus. The search results show 151,862 occurrences of 'Ukraine' with a frequency of 2.47 per million tokens and a density of 0.00025%. The interface includes a search bar, a list of concordance lines with left and right context, and a KWIC (Key Word In Context) view. The search results show various adjectives used to describe Ukraine, such as 'eastern', 'western', 'Hungary', and 'Moldova'.

Fig. 1. Example of concordance lines of the attributive modifiers of the lemma 'Ukraine' in the English Web 2021 (enTenTen21) corpus

the international implications of this fight. The second group of adjectives relates to *west/western* (-central/eastern/W) areas of Ukraine – 10,578, and the third relates to *south/southern* (-central/east/eastern/west/western/SW) regions – 5,430. Less common in the corpus but noteworthy are modifiers denoting other parts of Ukraine: *central* (-western/northern) – 1,611; *north/northern* (-central/east/eastern/west/western/NW) – 1,202; *Right-Bank* – 883; *Left-Bank* – 653, among others.

Many adjectives used with the most common descriptors, *eastern* and *western*, perpetuate a stereotypical contrastive image of the country's regions, where eastern territories are described as *industrial/industrialised* and *pro-Russian* or *Russia-leaning/oriented*, whereas the west is portrayed as less economically developed, *agricultural*, but *Western-oriented*.

Adjectives such as *whole* (283), *entire* (163), and *mainland* (315) evoke a sense of unity, although it is overshadowed by the prevailing use of modifiers, indicating the country's geographical regions. The size of Ukraine is also commonly referenced in the corpus, with adjectives highlighting its largeness (*big/great/large* – 114) or relative smallness, often in comparison to Russia or within a Russian imperial context (*little* – 74). One of the most frequent descriptors in this domain is *neighbouring* (616), which highlights the country's geographical position.

The second most frequently referenced domain in the adjectival characterisation of Ukraine concerns **Eras and timeframes**. The modifiers in this group collectively construct an image of a country shaped across different historical periods from older times to more recent epochs, highlighting past dominations, external controls and ideological influences. Examples include: *10th to 21st-century* (97), *ancient* (60), *Austrian* (-ruled) (26), *Cossack* (58), *Early Modern* (36), *German occupied* (67), *medieval* (41), *Polish* (-ruled/controlled/governed) (166), *post-communist* (67), *post-Maidan* (96), *post-Soviet (era)* (343), *post-revolutionary* (37), *Russian (ruled)* (320), *Soviet (era)* (2,504), and many others. The frequent use of modifiers such as *contemporary* (427), *current* (141), *modern (day)* (1,494), *new* (509), *present (day)* (969) Ukraine, as well as *future* (41), in this domain creates a positive image of a modern independent state with a forward-looking perspective.

The third most frequent group of modifiers falls within the domain of **Politics and geopolitics**, contributing to a mixed and often contradictory portrayal of the country's political identity and orientation. A large group of adjectives, among which the most common are: *autonomous* (39), *democratic* (415), *European* (120), *free* (495), *independent* (2,302), *pro-Western/west* (43), *responsible* (79), *sovereign* (185), *stable* (61), *unified* (60), *unitary* (49), and *united* (419), depict Ukraine as a legitimate, self-governing nation, aligned with European democratic values.

In contrast, adjectives such as *controlled* (38), *corrupt* (90), and *pro-Russian* (35) negatively portray

the country, signifying internal weaknesses and faults, and subjection to external influence. This domain is also replete with false characterisations of Ukraine disseminated by Russian propagandistic outlets, for example, by the websites SouthFront and Strategic Culture Foundation, which operate under the control of the Russian government and were sanctioned by the US Treasury [17]. These and other outlets cultivate a hostile image of the country, describing it as *fascist* (41) or *Nazi* (27), and advocating the necessity of turning it into a *neutral* (72), *federal/federalised* (106) state.

The fourth large domain in terms of Ukraine's adjectival modification is called **Features and perceptions**. This group includes a wide range of adjectives that offer varied evaluations of the country, emphasising its positive and negative qualities, resulting in its complex and ambivalent portrayal. Adjectives such as *able* (121), *active* (61), *different* (68), *famous* (43), *great* (69), *important* (125), *interested* (98), *ready* (250), *real* (41), *strong* (258), *successful* (56), *willing* (45) and others collectively present an image of a dynamic and self-sufficient nation with the capacity to succeed on the global stage. Emotionally charged adjectives such as *beautiful* (41), *beloved* (36), *good* (60), *native* (394), and *picturesque* (32) provide a more affective depiction of the country. The inclusion of *orange* (55) resonates with the Orange Revolution, while *red* (36) also functions as an ideological marker, historically linked to socialism and communism, thus alluding to Ukraine's Soviet past.

A much smaller quantity of negative modifiers like *anonymous* (54), *hostile* (34), *not able/unable* (90), *not ready* (56), *poor* (33), *revolutionary* (41), and *vulnerable* (77) foreground the challenges faced by the country, including economic difficulties, political instability, and the pressures of war in the east. This partly overlaps with the domain of the **Economic state**. The most frequent adjectives in this domain present the country's economy, past and present, in contrasting ways. On the one hand, the country is portrayed as *dependent* (102) on Russia's gas and oil, *bankrupt* (76), *poor* (79), *rural* (137), *weak* (81), and on the other, as *prosperous* (169), *rich* (50), and *stable* (61). Notably, positive descriptions often appear in expressions of hope and future visions of Ukraine.

Modifiers within the **War and conflict** domain construct an image of a nation marked by warfare and ideological contestation. Adjectives such as *conflict-affected* (-hit, ravaged, ridden, riddled, riven, stricken, torn, wracked) (77), *occupied* (185), *rebel-held* (-controlled) (90), *Russian-annexed* (-invaded, controlled, occupied) (57), *separatist-controlled* (-held) (32), and *war-torn* (212), emphasise the country's ongoing struggle for territorial unity and highlight the external influences shaping this crisis. In contrast, adjectives *peaceful* (34) and *secure* (53) introduce a sense of stability in Ukraine.

Again, there is the repeated use of modifiers such as *Nazi-occupied* (-controlled, held) (92) spread by Russian propagandistic disinformation outlets along with seemingly independent websites (e.g., zarubezhom.

com; softpanorama.org). These platforms contribute to the amplification of narratives consistent with a wider Russian disinformation campaign aimed at discrediting Ukraine and justifying Russian military intervention. The frequent use of adjectives such as *Nazi*, *fascists* and their numerous compounds in the corpus to characterise Ukraine demonstrates the extensive spread of Russian ideological propaganda and disinformation online. This also refers to the adjectives used to advocate and promote federalisation of Ukraine and its neutral non-aligned status.

The fewest modifiers are used to characterise the country's **Society and identity**. This domain encompasses adjectives relating to the country's religious, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and political dimensions. The most common modifiers in this group, such as *literary* (34), *Orthodox* (43), and *united* (143), describe a nationally united country, highlighting its shared cultural heritage and unity. References to the *Russian-speaking* (85) population and to the *Russian* (54) eastern and central regions are juxtaposed with the *Ukrainian* (36) national identity.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the study of adjectival modification of the lemma 'Ukraine' in the English Web 2021 (enTenTen21) corpus demonstrates the diversity of its representation,

with many adjectives emphasising its regional division or unity, current geopolitical status and sovereignty, while also evoking historical references to the Soviet past and frequent mentions of the war in the east of the country, as well as Russia's occupation and annexation of Crimea.

Based on the research findings, the image of Ukraine emerges as multidimensional and ideologically charged. Negative portrayals, often amplified by Russian disinformation, emphasise instability and external control, while a parallel positive narrative underscores resilience, national unity, and the country's aspirations towards European integration. Ukraine is simultaneously framed as vulnerable and strong, fragmented and united, historically burdened and modern. This polarised representation of Ukraine reveals a deeper ideological struggle over how the nation is positioned within global narratives. Thus, the dominant discursive framework for the image of Ukraine in the analysed English-language online discourse is characterised by its dualistic and controversial portrayal.

Future research could extend this analysis by comparing diachronically different corpora or subcorpora of the English Web 2021 (enTenTen21) corpus, testing whether these adjectival domains and their evaluative tendencies remain consistent across genres and periods.

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**Грижак Людмила Михайлівна** – кандидат філологічних наук, доцент кафедри англійської мови Чернівецького національного університету імені Юрія Федьковича; e-mail: [lhryzhak@chnu.edu.ua](mailto:lhryzhak@chnu.edu.ua); ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9485-778X>; GOOGLE SCHOLAR: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=4eLWx9sAAAAJ>; RESEARCH GATE: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Liudmyla-Hryzhak>

## **ПРИКМЕТНИКОВА ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКА УКРАЇНИ В КОРПУСІ ENGLISH WEB 2021 (enTenTen21)**

Дослідження аналізує прикметникову характеристику України в корпусі English Web 2021 (enTenTen21). Функціонуючи як модифікатори іменника, прикметники кваліфікують референти, описуючи й оцінюючи їх, і тим самим формують перспективу, крізь яку ці референти сприймаються та оцінюються. Мета дослідження полягає у вивченні образу України, сформованого завдяки такій модифікації; а актуальність роботи зумовлена тим, що проаналізований корпус було створено до повномасштабного російського нападу на Україну.

Прикметники, що модифікують лему *Ukraine* у корпусі, ідентифіковано, проаналізовано та згруповано в кілька тематичних доменів з огляду на їхню семантику та контекстуальне вживання: територія й клімат, епохи та часові рамки, політика й геополітика, характеристики та уявлення, економічний стан, війна й конфлікт, суспільство й ідентичність. Результати показують складне й амбівалентне змалювання країни: більшість модифікаторів характеризують територіальний поділ країни, її історичний розвиток, сучасний геополітичний статус і суверенітет, а також оцінюють її позитивні й негативні якості. Часті посилання на радянське минуле, окупацію та анексію Криму Росією й триваючу війну на сході підкреслюють виклики, з якими стикається Україна, утверджуючись як суверенна й єдина держава на глобальній арені. Негативні зображення, часто підсилені російською дезінформацією, представляють Україну як нестабільну, контрольовану або корумповану, тоді як позитивні характеристики наголошують на її сучасності, незалежності, стійкості, єдності та прагненні до європейської інтеграції.

Загалом, прикметникова репрезентація України в проаналізованому онлайн-дискурсі конструює складний та ідеологічно забарвлений образ країни, позначений поляризацією в зображенні її сили та вразливості, єдності та фрагментації, бурхливого історичного минулого та майбутньої зорієнтованості на європейську траєкторію. Результати демонструють, як мова відображає та формує сприйняття України в сучасному англомовному онлайн-дискурсі.

**Ключові слова:** корпус, модифікація, образ, прикметник, Україна.

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