

**A. V. Kenyz,**

*ScD in Philology, Associate Professor,  
Head Consultant of the Education Center  
of Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine*

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1031-5546>;

**V. F. Kenyz,**

*Sergeant of the Armed Forces of Ukraine*

## **MODERN WARTIME PSYOPS: COMMUNICATIVE TYPOLOGY**

The article is aimed at detailing and illustrating the basic technologies of PSYOPS utilized within the modern information field, exploring the specificity of pathogenicity implementation in PSYOPS discourse as an object and the key communicative characteristics of the analyzed discourses making it possible to discern them into certain types as a subject. Traditionally, the pathogenic texts, which are the backbone of any PSYOP due to being its verbal, communicative representation, are distinguished into those that contribute to the spread of violence (reference to manipulating the negative emotions pushed to the max), pornography (reference to manipulating the positive emotions pushed to the max) and texts of totalitarian ideology and propaganda in mass communication. The first two types are

obviously pathogenic and are explicitly prohibited by the current legislation, while the third type of pathogenic texts is quite difficult to categorize as actually illegal. It is usually the third type that is being utilized in the PSYOP paradigm, due to its legal status uncertainty (which makes it easy to implement into public communications). A thorough linguistic analysis of over 5 000 pathogenic discourses made it possible to divide PSYOPS discourses into the basic types, according to the techniques utilized. In this particular article, we aim to single out the basic PSYOPS types which the Russian propaganda has incessantly been using even before the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022, but has unprecedentedly increased since then, in order to destabilize the information field in Ukraine and create an unparalleled tension in the society — as well as to whitewash its own war crimes, even though those have been fixed and documented by a number of renowned world organizations. The following PSYOPS techniques are characterized basing on their communicative peculiarities: “goldfish”, reframing, “merry pictures”, official papers manipulation, clickbait, information alibi, demonizing, witch hunt — with the according examples provided. Having presented and illustrated the most frequent PSYOPS techniques, it can be stated that singling out the prevalent PSYOPS types will help craft ways of countering them, and thus, would allow to reduce or even fully neutralize the harmful effects of the original pathogenic array.

**Key words:** PSYOPS, influence, information warfare, NLP, Suggestive Linguistics, suggestion, Neurolinguistic Programming, pathogenic text, suggestion.

**А. В. Кениз,**

*д-р філол. наук, доц.,*

*головний консультант Освітнього центру*

*Верховної Ради України*

*ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1031-5546>;*

**В. Ф. Кениз,**

*сержант Збройних Сил України*

## СУЧАСНІ ВІЙСЬКОВІ ІПСО: КОМУНІКАТИВНА ТИПОЛОГІЯ

Метою статті є деталізація та ілюстрація основних технологій ІПСО, що використовуються в сучасному інформаційному полі, з дослідженням специфіки реалізації патогенності в ІПСО-дискурсі як об'єктом та ключових комунікативних характеристиках аналізованих дискурсів, що дають змогу диференціювати їх на певні типи, як предметом дослідження. Традиційно патогенні тексти, які є основою будь-якого ІПСО, оскільки є його вербальною, комунікативною репрезентацією, поділяються на ті, що сприяють поширенню насильства (настанова на маніпулювання негативними емоціями, доведена до максимуму), порнографії (настанова на маніпулювання позитивними емоціями, доведена до максимуму) та тексти тоталітарної ідеології і пропаганди в масовій комунікації. Перші два типи є очевидно патогенними і прямо

заборонені чинним законодавством, тоді як третій тип патогенних текстів досить складно віднести до категорії власне незаконних. Зазвичай саме третій тип використовується в парадигмі ІПСО через невизначеність його правового статусу (що дозволяє легко впроваджувати його в публічні комунікації). Ретельний лінгвістичний аналіз понад 5 000 патогенних дискурсів дозволив розділити ІПСО-дискурси на основні типи відповідно до використовуваних прийомів. У цій статті ми маємо на меті виокремити основні види ІПСО, які російська пропаганда постійно використовувала ще до початку повномасштабного вторгнення у 2022 році, але з того часу безпрецедентно активізувалася, щоб дестабілізувати інформаційне поле в Україні та створити безпрецедентну напругу в суспільстві, а також відбілити власні воєнні злочини, попри те, що вони зафіксовані та задокументовані низкою авторитетних світових інституцій. Охарактеризовано такі техніки ІПСО, виходячи з їхніх комунікативних особливостей: «золота рибка», рефреймінг, «веселі картинки», маніпуляція офіційними документами, клікбейт, інформаційне алібі, демонізація, полювання на відьом — з наведенням відповідних прикладів. Представивши та проілюструвавши найпоширеніші техніки ІПСО, можна стверджувати, що виокремлення найпоширеніших типів ІПСО допоможе розробити способи протидії їм, а отже, дозволить зменшити або навіть повністю нейтралізувати шкідливий вплив вихідного патогенного масиву.

**Ключові слова:** ІПСО, вплив, інформаційна війна, НЛП, сугестивна лінгвістика, навіювання, нейролінгвістичне програмування, патогенний текст, сугестія.

**Problem statement and the latest scientific researches and publications analysis.** The modern paradigm of netocracy, which, in its turn, forms the whole new society — the netocratic one — refers to a “perceived global upper-class that bases its power on a technological advantage and networking skills, in comparison to what is portrayed as a bourgeoisie of a gradually diminishing importance” [17], having been invented by the editorial board of the “Wired” American technology magazine in the early 1990’s, and later developed by the Swedish philosophers Alexander Bard and Jan Söderqvist.

The main characteristics of such a society include:

- using the information as power, since “the ability to access, process, and disseminate information is paramount. Individuals who can effectively utilize information networks to their advantage gain social and political influence” [10];
- erosion of traditional boundaries, including the personal ones, due to the internet and digital technologies’ “blurring geographical and social boundaries, creating a more interconnected and fluid society, which leads to the formation of new communities and the breakdown of traditional social structures” [10];
- focus on attention and value creation, since “in the digital realm, attention is a valuable commodity, thus, netocrats may focus on capturing and directing attention, as it can lead to influence and opportunities” [10].

Since influence is defined to be one of the key features of the netocratic society, it's obvious that the conceptual bases of understanding this phenomenon should be defined, as well. Since our work is carried out within the premises of the linguistic study of influence, it is necessary to separate the communicative and linguistic influence, where the former "is complex, i.e. contains linguistic, non-verbal and extralinguistic components, where the linguistic one is dominant, and also has a complex nature due to the indivisible unity of neurophysiological, psychological and linguistic components in its architectonics" [6, p. 203], and the latter is a component of the former and manifests itself only at the level of verbalization. We fully agree with the definition of communicative influence as "the impact on individual and / or collective consciousness and behavior, which is carried out not only by various linguistic means, but also with the help of paralinguistic semiotic means, which include, first of all, gestures, facial expressions and postures (kinetics); aesthetic codes of verbal creativity, graphic design of the text (metagrafemics), etc." [[6, p. 151]; we define speech influence as a component of communicative influence, as "influence on the consciousness and behavior of an individual through language" [1, p. 6].

On top of that, we propose to distinguish the basic positions according to the criteria of a) appeal of influence to rational (conscious, critical, dominant) or irrational (emotional, associative, subdominant) perception of information to persuasion, which is "influence on consciousness by building a rational argument" [6, p. 152], and suggestion, which is an influence on consciousness or subconsciousness through the emotional sphere; b) in turn, within suggestion, we distinguish, according to the criterion of the level of intentionality (benefit, outright benefit for the suggestor), suggestion (minimum and medium level of benefit for the suggestor, for example, in social advertising) and manipulation (maximum level of benefit for the suggestor, for example, political communication (including advertising) and commercial advertising); c) within the same framework of suggestion, according to the level of intensity of the manifestation of influential effects, we distinguish between uptime models (low and medium level of intensity, for example, any influential texts and discourses that do not require deepening into a hypnotic trance) and downtime models (maximum level of intensity, for example, the direct state of antifactuality, hypnosis); d) within hypnosis itself, as the highest level of influence, we propose to distinguish therapeutic hypnosis (used in psycho- and hypnotherapy sessions to correct negative psychological states of the patient) and manipulative hypnosis (characterized by the addressee's clearly expressed goal to achieve certain material or intangible goals through the implementation of this influence, for example, in religious sects, etc.).

The specificity of the aforementioned netocratic society leads to all the types of influence being present in the communicative discourses it produces, but due to the increasing amount of information needed for the functioning of society and thus, the decreasing quality control of the information perused by the recipient, these discourses are mainly characterized by pervasive suggestibility and pathogenicity which «causes or, in the opinion of experts, is capable of causing harm to the moral and mental health of an individual, nation, state, humanity» [7, p. 209]. That suggestiveness and pathogenicity

extend to all its types and kinds, but acquire absolute weight during wartime, information combat being its irreplaceable part, along with traditional field one. This discourse is referred to as PSYOPS — psychological operations, defined by the US DoD as “planned political, economic, military, and ideological activities directed towards foreign countries, organizations, and individuals in order to create emotions, attitudes, understanding, beliefs, and behavior favorable to the achievement of ... political and military objectives” [15], emphasizing that those “convey selected info and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior” [15].

Traditionally, PSYOPS is understood as conducting special operations in the enemy's information field, shaping public opinion in the right direction [15], are considered within the framework of state security paradigm and conducted by the special military units being a part of Department of Defense (as it is done in the USA, albeit PSYOPs are sometimes referred to as MISO — Military Information Support Operations) or Special Operations Forces / Main Directorate of Intelligence (as it is done in Ukraine). Nevertheless, the linguistic component is their crucial part, and studying them in the paradigm of modern communication sciences, such as Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Suggestive Linguistics, Spin-Doctoring is an obvious step towards optimizing their effectiveness, which defines **the relevance of the research**.

**The object of the research**, aimed at detailing and illustrating the basic technologies of PSYOPS utilized within the modern information field, is the specificity of pathogenicity implementation in PSYOPS discourse, while the key communicative characteristics of the analyzed discourses making it possible to discern them into certain types are its **subject**, emphasizing the **novelty** and contemporary nature of the article.

In order to achieve this aim, it is necessary to perform the following tasks: characterize the type of very concept of the pathogenic texts utilized in the modern PSYOPS paradigm; identify the main PSYOPS types as the modern information warfare markers; characterize each type with a special emphasis on its communicative specificity and illustrate them with valid examples; outline the prospects for further development in this area.

**The factual research material** was recorded during 2022 — 2025 and includes news, blog and vlog publications in the current information field (over 5 000 units of each type).

**The theoretical value** of the article lies within the fact that it would serve not only in detailing the provisions of these sciences, as well as Imageology, Psycholinguistics, PR / GR, Strategic Management, Neuromarketing, etc., but also in possible formation of relevant planning decisions in the field of Ukraine's state information security, which is an important aspect of the any state's information policy, which emphasizes its **practical value**, as well.

**Main research material presentation.** Traditionally, the pathogenic texts, which are the backbone of any PSYOP due to being its verbal, communicative representation, are defined as structures with built-in mechanisms of self-expansion, which are “prohibited by law or do not fit into the framework of dominant social morality” [7, p. 32]. Researchers note that in different value systems, the following main features of a pathogenic text are distinguished:

- those aiming to undermine faith in God;
- those aiming to undermine national and state interests;
- those posing a threat to global security or a threat to public morality;
- those leading to neglect of fundamental human rights and freedoms;
- those having a harmful psychological impact (excessive demonstration of violence) [7, p. 32].

K. Serazhim argues that texts that “contain propaganda of class and racial hatred, pornography, hyperbolic advertising, and totalitarian texts” can be considered pathogenic [9, p. 156], and C. S. Proskurkina emphasizes that pathogenic texts include texts “aimed at destroying faith in God; aimed at undermining national and state interests; those that threaten the security of humanity; texts that pose a threat to public morality; texts that have a harmful psychological impact on a person; texts that promote evil in any form: this includes callousness, cruelty, hatred, rudeness, permissiveness, and so on...” [8].

B. Potiatynyk and M. Lozynsky, trying to specify the basic features and strategic vectors of pathogenic texts, propose to define them as those that contribute to the spread of violence (reference to manipulating the negative emotions pushed to the max), pornography (reference to manipulating the positive emotions pushed to the max) and texts of totalitarian ideology and propaganda in mass communication [7, p. 34].

The first two types are obviously pathogenic and are explicitly prohibited by the current legislation, as Article 3 of the Law of Ukraine “On Printed Mass Media (Press) in Ukraine” states that it is prohibited to use printed media for

- 1) propaganda of war, violence and cruelty;
- 2) incitement to racial, national, or religious hatred;
- 3) distribution of pornography, as well as for the purpose of committing terrorist acts and other criminal offenses [3].

The third type of pathogenic texts, although correlated with paragraphs 1, 5, 6 of Article 3 of the Law, is quite difficult to categorize as actually illegal, as emphasized by the famous Communications scientist F. Batsevych, who believes that “these signs are not subject to a clear criterion and are largely subjective” [2, p. 153], since it is not always possible to determine the pathogenicity or adequacy of a text definitively, nor to take appropriate preventive measures, because legislative acts, unfortunately, do not always keep up with the rapid development of the latest information technologies and scientific achievements in modern society.

It is usually the third type that is being utilized in the PSYOP paradigm, due to its legal status uncertainty (which makes it easy to implement into public communications) and the fact that as per usual, PSYOPS are aimed at promoting the military information policy of the curator, promoting the political goals of the curator, promoting the information policy of the curator's non-military groups, spreading lies of a military nature (see 4, 5, 11, 12, 13).

Even though the PSYOPS discourses are so-called “right-hemispherical ones” (see 4, 5, 11, 12, 13) and are supposed to activate the addressees' non-critical, irrational perception, their success largely relies on the recipients' inability to analyze info and on

their connection to reality, slight as it might be in this matter. That is, if the majority of the target audience is capable of carrying out a general analysis of PSYOPS discourses having already been directed at them and comparing the actual facts with the data presented in the PSYOPS discourse, then the objectives of those discourses usually wouldn't be achieved, especially if the discourses tailored for being perceived by a non-critical audience are directed onto a critically thinking one — which is exactly why most of the PSYOPS crafted by the Russian propaganda fails to influence the Ukrainian audience as predictably as it traditionally influences the domestic one.

A thorough linguistic analysis of over 5 000 pathogenic discourses made it possible to divide PSYOPS discourses into the following basic types, according to the techniques utilized. In this particular research, we aim to single out the basic PSYOPS types / techniques which the Russian propaganda has incessantly been using even before the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022, but has unprecedentedly increased since then, in order to destabilize the information field in Ukraine and create an unparalleled tension in the society — as well as to whitewash its own war crimes, even though those have been fixed and documented by a number of renowned world organizations.

1. **“Goldfish” PSYOP type.** This type is originally based on a traditional NLP overload technique, according to which “Miller’s magical number”,  $7 \pm 2$ , is the approximate number of data units a human consciousness can comfortably hold in the operative, quick-access memory, and an excessive amount of those tends to pull the perception into downtime phase and thus make the suggester more susceptible to any influence (see 14). The “goldfish” technique is aimed at overloading the addressee’s conscious perception with too much information, making it impossible to analyze each particular piece, thus allowing to utilize pieces of data not coherent not just with reality, but even with the previous data from the same source. I.e., on February 26, Russian Ministry of Defense announced that *“all Ukrainian military aviation has been destroyed”*, yet on May 6, an announcement about *“destroying the 152nd out of 152 Ukrainian military jets”* was made again, and afterwards, numerous announcements of the same type have been released, even though they directly contradict the initial ones.
2. **Reframing.** Another classical NLP technique, which is based on changing the way a certain stimulus is presented in order to achieve a prognosticated reaction to it (see 4, 5, 11, 12, 13), is utilized by the Russian propaganda to formulate a certain way their target audience perceives certain facts, often presenting totally opposite points of view about one particular data item — so that this view correlates with the current situation, even if it contradicts the previous information from the same source. I.e., on May 7, Russian channels claimed that *“Zmiyinyi isle is the key to Ukraine’s main naval base and has crucial importance”*, but after the loss of control of the isle, the claims changed and started to sound as if *“the strategic value of Zmiyinyi isle is absolute zero”*, thus explaining the *“goodwill gesture”* of leaving it. The same technique was used to explain

*“strategic regrouping”* from Kharkiv region, as well as from Kherson one. This very technique has been used by the russian propaganda in the very first speech of the kremlin dictator vladimir putin after the start of the full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, when he has non-chalantly claimed that *“russia was forced to start the special military operation because otherwise, Ukraine would have attacked it first”*, and since then, it’s fairly used to emphasize that Ukraine’s attacks on russian military objects are *“terrorist ones”*, while russia’s shellings of Ukrainian civilian infrastructure are dubbed either *“retaliation strikes”* or *“routine work of destroying the military bases”*.

3. **“Merry pictures”**. This technique relies more on the imagery than wording, and presupposes either altering the already existing photos to make them represent something else due to the changes (i.e., editing the russian chevron onto the uniform of a Lebanese soldier aiming his RPG-7 anti-tank weapon at an Israeli Merkava tank (photo taken on March 5, 2023) and then publishing “hot news” about an allegedly russian soldier destroying a German Leopard 2A5 tank after they have just been delivered to Ukraine) or creating brand new pictures with the help of the according AI editors and claiming those to be real.
4. **Official papers manipulation**. Traditionally, most recipients tend to believe the official information, especially official documents with visual “officialness” markers (blanks, signatures, stamps, etc.) more than ordinary messages, which is exactly why the russian media often abuses this innate trust and intentionally “leaks” allegedly “secret” papers aimed at demonizing their respective authors and creating panic among the target groups (though, it has to be noted that Ukrainian language, despite certain misinformation, has its own grammar and punctuation peculiarities, which, apparently, aren’t taken into account by the fake papers authors, thus making it quite easy to tell a fake from an original). I.e., in March 2022, Russian media presented a *“secret order”* allegedly signed by Odesa Military Administration Head Maksym Marchenko, in which he allegedly *“ordered to place heavy artillery in the city’s schools and kindergartens and prohibit the citizen’s exit from the city via humanitarian corridors”*.
5. **Clickbait**. As per usual, this technique is used in the Internet media channels on various messenger platforms (i.e., Telegram, Viber) or social media (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok) and relies on the recipient’s being interested in the manipulative header enough to click the link that promises the ending to this story, yet most likely, it leads to an external third-party resource that either installs malignant data on the recipient’s device or ends up stealing their data. Sometimes, this technique also abuses the most painful and inner fears of the recipients to make them click the link to find a solution to them, thus manipulating the pathogenic discourse concept of maximizing the negative emotions (i.e., many TG channels publish posts like *“We have found the most reliable source showing the exact trajectory of russian missiles! Click here and*



*ensure your own safety!*", totally ignoring the fact that only the military has access to such resources, yet still tricking recipients into clicking purposefully harmful links).

6. **Information alibi.** This technique is used to legitimize any author's actions by presenting an alleged explanation of why it would have to be done in advance. I.e., on March 9, russian MIA representative announced that the maternity house in Mariupol is "*cleared of the mothers in labor and is filled with terrorists from Azov division*", thus formally legitimizing the ruthless shelling of the maternity house that followed in several hours.
7. **Demonizing.** This type of PSYOPS is aimed at shifting the public opinion about either a single person or a large group of people with the help of presenting some allegedly shocking information about them, which would invoke one of the pillars of the pathogenic discourse concept — maximizing the negative emotions — and thus, shift the perception paradigm of the recipients, making them question their attitude. This technique could be divided into two subclasses on the basis of its aim: whether it's aimed at a single person (i.e. in 2023, russian media launched a demonizing campaign against the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, claiming that he "*wears a bracelet with Nazi symbols engraved on it, and is the Head Nazi*") or a group, however large it might be (i.e., russian media heavily relies on utilizing videos of allegedly Ukrainian soldiers discussing how they have been "*torturing russian PoWs and civilians, because it is fun*").
8. **Witch hunt.** This technique is based on abusing a widely known psychological term named "Zero Point Condition", which is "the lowest possible energy that a mechanical system may have. Unlike in classical mechanics, quantum systems constantly fluctuate in their lowest energy state as described by the Heisenberg uncertainty principle" [16], and a human being, who is also a highly complicated system, finds themselves in this condition navigating anxiety, anger, stress, and depression, thus becoming increasingly vulnerable to any kind of external influence, which tends to abuse this state in order to make the recipient look for its cause in the wrong direction and unleashing these negative emotion onto a close person. The direction of such harmful influence may range from either trying to make Ukrainians conflict with each other (i.e., russian media channels tend to publish posts like "While the people from Eastern and Central Ukraine share the very last things they have to survive, the Western Ukrainians up the rent prices threefold and just make money from people they have to help. So think whether they are actually Ukrainians!") or make the people from the partner counties conflict with Ukrainians (i.e., russian propaganda in the EU tends to publish posts depicting Ukrainians as the public enemies of the EU, say, the russian Ambassador to Latvia Mikhail Vanin during his appearance at "Solovyov Live" propaganda show emphasized, "*Riga right now looks like a huge*

*Ukrainian city with the according Nazi mottos and banners. The monuments are being desecrated, monuments to russian heroes, and the authorities don't even frown upon that!"*).

**Research findings and prospects for further research.** As of now, this is not quite the complete list of PSYOPS techniques circulating in the current information space since these are constantly evolving, and new types arise from time to time, but only the select few remain in the information field once they have proven their effectiveness. Having presented and illustrated the most frequent PSYOPS techniques, it can be stated that singling out the prevalent PSYOPS types will help craft ways of countering them, and thus, would allow to reduce or even fully neutralize the harmful effects of the original pathogenic array. This, in turn, will be useful in forming relevant planning decisions in Ukraine's state info security field, which acquires special importance in the conditions of hybrid wars, thus emphasizing the perspective of further researches of a kind, which would allow not only to identify the basic strategies for constructing such arrays and the deep mechanisms of their formulation and, consequently, impact on recipients, but also ways to counteract each of the types of such discourses, which will be the focus of our further scientific developments.

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