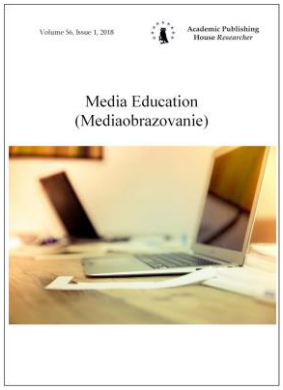
Copyright © 2018 by Academic Publishing House Researcher s.r.o.

Published in the Slovak Republic
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Has been issued since 2005
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 1994-4195
2018, 58(3): 108-118

DOI: 10.13187/me.2018.3.108
www.ejournal53.com



Content analysis of media texts covering crises on practical seminars on political psychology as a necessary condition of the upgrade of the students' communicative culture (on the example of chemical attack in Ghouta in 2013)

Galina Melnik [a], Konstantin Pantserev [a], Natalia Sveshnikova [a, *]

[a] St. Petersburg State University, Russian Federation

Abstract

Content analysis is one of the most frequently used methods that shows significant results when applied during studies on political psychology for students enrolled in the departments of political sciences, psychology, international relations, journalism and applied communications in St. Petersburg State University as all these departments widely use media materials for study purposes. Content analysis is used for studying sources that are invariant in their structure or contents, but as a text form are organized chaotically. The article explains the method of content analysis of Russian and foreign media texts covering the events in Syria after the chemical attack on the citizens of Ghouta (2013). Suggested method may be used for studying political events that are conflictogenic by their nature. Authors come to the conclusion that content analysis of media texts is a crucial component of developing critical thinking and media expertise in students. An important part of the training is mastering the key concepts, allowing to understand the significant subjects in the media producing, broadcasting or consuming one or another content.

Keywords: media education, media, content analysis of media texts, media representations, media competence confrontation between information and psychology, Syria, conflict.

1. Introduction

Content analysis is an informative method of analysis of political discourse that helps to reveal the psychological contents of the text, factors of creating image of the person who produces the text. Content analysis is a quantitative analysis of texts grouped into text masses, its purpose lies in subsequent interpretation of discovered numerical regularity's contents.

Students use this method in their individual work and during practical seminars for discovering and measuring socio-political facts and tendencies reflected in media. This method is used to indicate periodical's orientation. The object of the study is posts in printed media, Internet media, radio and TV messages. Media text is used to indicate the object of the study and the form that the material takes (its language, structure, genre, rhythm and tone of voice). As a rule, a single unit of text is used as an element of contents. Numerical unit of interconnection between text and out-of-text phenomena, frequency of its appearance (intensity) is used as a countable unit. Regular sample contains from 100 to 600 texts. The main tool is a table of content analysis with outlined indicators (features) that quantify the meaning. It is important for the units of analysis to represent

* Corresponding author:
E-mail addresses: melnik.gs@gmail.com (G.S. Melnik), pantserev@yandex.ru (K.A. Pantserev), sveshnikovan@mail.ru (N.O. Sveshnikova)

coordinated categories (Content analysis...). Scientific sources that cover the event chosen for content analysis work as a research basis. Articles written by political science specialists that characterized the military conflict in Syria were used in this capacity (Alieva, 2015; Borujerdi, 2015; Riad Haddad, 2013; Lobanov, Moiseev, 2015, Makhnev, 2014; Noskova, 2014; Podrabinek, 2013; Stepanova, 2012; Farwell, Arakelian, 2013; etc.)

2. Materials and methods

Experts in linguistics call the method of content analysis "a research method that is directed to systematic, objective and based on countable data study of the contents of communication" (Kuzmina: 37), and the purpose of this method is "to identify and count events when the chosen units of text were used, and to study messages, images and representations contained in media texts in the broader social context based on this" (Dobrosklonskaya, 2008). The method of content analysis is based on statistical count of the specially chosen text units (not only verbal) and gives a researcher of mass communication a really broad spectrum of possibilities. "High methodological potential of content analysis is conditioned by the fact that practically any component of media text may serve as a countable unit, both verbal (word, phrase, names of politicians, etc.) and visual (repeated images, audio and video clips)" (Dobrosklonskaya, 2008). The purpose of the research may lie in defining whether the contents of media, its inner structure and characteristics of formal style coordinate with conceptual model and orientation of the particular media. It may also involve determining the dominant idea reflected in a collection of publications (Fedorov, 2008).

The choice of the topic was based on a growing interest in the society in the events in Syria, especially among students (Mironets, Yakovleva, 2015; Egorov, 2016; Stepanenko, Lysenko, 2016). The choice of research period was based on the fact that at that moment the conflict in Syria transitioned into an acute military phase. Students of St. Petersburg State University studied representation of political events during the conflict in Syria on the example of media response to the event connected with gas attack in Ghouta, the suburb of Damascus, that happened on the 21st of August, 2013. The purpose of the study was to compare psychological contents of representation of the political event in the English-spoken and Russian sources.

It is very urgent to comprehend the experience of Syrian conflict due to a number of reasons. After a series of mishaps in the international media field Russia for the first time in the recent years has taken an active position in the foreign policy activity. The role that Russian and US media's position has played in the event should also be interpreted. It is crucial to note that the example of Syria confirms the tendencies in mediatization of political conflicts on the international scene, and this aspect is still understudied.

The subject of the study was media image of the political event. The object of the study was federal media (for Russian sources) and national media (for foreign sources). The following Russian publications were chosen for the purpose of study: newspapers *Rossiyskaya gazeta, Vedomosti, Kommersant* and magazines *Kommersant. Vlast', Russkiy reporter, Expert.*

The choice of western publications was limited to the ones represented in the *Medialogia* system (Russian automatic system of media monitoring and analysis); two leading newspapers from the USA and the UK and such sources from the USA as the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* and from the UK – *The Telegraph* and *The Guardian* were thoroughly analyzed.

In the process of research, a system of quantitative units was developed. It consisted of 8 variables divided into 3 modules: a module of quantitative calculation of reference (countries, names, participants, organizations), a module of lexical structural-semantic and conceptual-thematic units (names of the events, processes) and evaluation module (participants' actions, evaluations). Specific text is used as a unit of analysis. Not less than 100 texts in total are required for the analysis.

Participants in Module 1 included all the main characters of the publication ("government forces", "rebels", "international players") and organizations ("government forces", "United Nations Security Council", "OPCW", "ministries of foreign affairs"). Every event had nomination ("conflict", "terrorism", "crisis"), processes ("attack ad", "negotiations") and actions ("advance of troops", "territory cleaning").

Evaluation module contained units and evaluations of actions of the participants or specific statements, situations, future ("Syrian rebels arranged photo shoots", assessment of actions – "they clearly overdid it") and also evaluations of the topic.

Thoroughly calculated units allowed to discover multiple interconnections between the events and patterns in the delivery of information.

A study conducted by students of St. Petersburg University (from the department of political psychology) who reviewed events in Syria represented in foreign and Russian media will be taken as an example. The sample consisted of 208 articles that were put into categories according to their semantic content and divided into 4 groups of semantic units: Fact – a headline provides only facts and inform audience about the events. Evaluation – there is an evaluative judgment. Suggested action – a headline consists of a suggested action in the future that mentions its characters. Specified decision – a headline includes information that predetermines evaluation of the text.

Analysis of the articles' names allows to determine differences in semantic contents of texts' headlines. It was determined that among Russian publications the biggest number (32 %) was represented by articles with headlines that register the facts (e.g.: "Syrian balance", "Reaction to chemicals", "Heads of foreign affairs ministries did not come to an agreement about Syria", "Time 's"); headlines with evaluations also had a big representation – 30 % (e.g.: "America is a mother of turmoil", "Ban Ki-moon does not want to be a "statist"", "Obama burned the "peace pipe""). Slightly less number of headlines (22 %) contained a suggested action (e.g.: "They continue to cheat", "Russia waits for physical "evidence", "Return to war") and 16 % of publications had a predetermined evaluation of text (examples: "Will G20 end the war?", "Humanism: will "Tomahawks' be delivered to Syria?", "Are you ready for the overthrow?", "Will Syria be bombed in the name of peace?").

Western publications have similar distribution but with distinctive difference. The number of headlines that contain only facts is significantly bigger – 38 % (e.g.: "Spectators report", "Deadline for disarmament plan is approaching", "Experts in chemical weapons begin negotiations with Syria"), while the ones that contain evaluation is less – 28 % (e.g.: "Merkel is basking in glory, Hollande is dragging through rain", "An offer we cannot refuse", "Obama's uncertain path amid Syria bloodshed"). Headlines that contain information about actions comprise only 21 % (e.g.: "Make al-Assad pay", "The UN investigates new alleged chemical attacks in Syria", "Syrian government gathers strength, but the siege continues"). 15 % of headlines contain information that predispositions text's evaluation (e.g.: "Missing Obama makes China the main force in OPEC", "Experts in Syria engage to eliminate the truth", "Right questions about Syria").

3. Discussion

According to media educators, "media has become an inseparable part of our lives whether we are children, young people, or adults; we all have our share of media-related exposure on a daily basis" (Bakuleva, Anisimova, 2014; Worsnop, 2013).

Throughout the centuries mass media "have been mutually interacting with politics. Regardless of their nature or role, the media have been key players in the most important" (Eid, 2014: 844) crisis situations (Hassan, 2014; Eid, 2013). In spite of the fact that their mission is just to provide unbiased information about different political or crisis situations actually they serve as an important tool of the creation of the public opinion which is convenient for the political elites of Western countries (Brinson, Stohl, 2012). One can explain this situation by the fact that when the threat of terrorism or some other crisis situation "is present, the public is in great need of extensive information in order to reduce uncertainty about the danger. The information from the media has tremendous impact on how the public understands an ongoing crisis" (Zeng, Tahat, 2012: 433; Sharp, Blanchard, 2012). And taking to the account the fact that the most well-known mass media have headquarters in the USA, Great Britain, Germany and some other Western countries it is well understood why there is dominating a Western point of view of any crisis situation happened all over the world in the global information and communication space. That's why sometimes it seems very difficult for ordinary people to understand this or that crisis situation and to form his or her point of view which won't be thrust by the Western mass media (Rich, 2013; Klausen, 2015; Bar-Tal, Nets-Zehngut, Shavrit, 2017).

The authors of the textbook "Media literacy. Keys to interpretation of media messages" consider: "To be successful, media professionals must demonstrate an understanding of the process of mass communication, the mastery of production methods and strategies. But in order to really improve the media industry, media communicators also need to know the problems and

responsibilities of professionals involved in the production of thoughtful (media) programming in the interest of the audience" (Silverblatt, Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2016).

That's why it seems extremely important to think about how to increase the level of communicative culture of ordinary people. The key moment in the development of the competencies of future professional communicators is media education technologies aimed at increasing the level of media and information literacy (Buckingham, 2009). Thus it is important to start implementing of corresponding practical master classes in the high school.

During the study of different crisis situations (the Syrian case, for example) students get new skills of analyzing conflictogenic/conflict texts, gain understanding that information confrontation happening in cyberspace makes different newsworthy product. Internet media manipulates not only minds of people in their own country, but also in other countries. Besides that, student may gain understanding that having information means fortifying your own power and reducing power of the enemy or developing a skill to resist information from the outside.

In order to regulate informational attacks several countries created laws that regulate the activities in the informational field. There is a number of documents that protect information and informational systems from the attacks both in Russia and the USA.

4. Results

The results of the study may be interpreted in the following manner: on the whole, analytic data for Russian and foreign publications are similar; the main difference is found in percentage of representation of fact-based headlines – 32 % in Russian publications and 38 % in foreign publications, which may be interpreted as similarity of content.

Analysis of the variable -concept of "COUNTRY"

In the process of text analysis, it was discovered that the following countries were mentioned (total of 13): the USA, the UK, Russia, Syria, China, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Albania, Norway, Bosnia, Jordan, Libya, and two country unions – the EU and the West (as quasi-referential unit). In both foreign and Russian publications, the most mentioned countries are Syria, the USA and Russia (more than 75 %).

Students' analysis considered the countries with the highest results as their comparison allowed to see key differences in the texts' meaning and to detect the whole field of participants. Countries with results higher than 5 % were divided into 3 groups: 1) primary – the main direction of attention, the most active players (more than 25 % of all mentions); 2) secondary – important players (10-25 % of all mentions); 3) tertiary – allies or not active important supporters (5-10 % of all mentions).

In the western publications the following countries were marked as primary: Syria (29,4 %) and the USA; secondary was Russia (20 %); tertiary – the UK (8,2 %).

In Russian publications: primary country was Syria (39,7 %); secondary – Russia (19,8 %) and the USA (17,2 %); tertiary – China (6,9 %) and Iraq (6,9 %).

In both cases the difference between primary and secondary countries was significant (10 %) which may point to a certain purposeful direction. Russian publications put emphasis on Syria, which may be interpreted as this country being the center of events and the main informational source. It also points to the detalization of processes in Syria. Study of materials has shown that Russia and the USA represent two contrast poles that draw other countries' attention to comprehend the conflict according to the unity in views, therefore, these countries are perceived as the main force that is reinforced by a lot of allies which makes them political. Mentions of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya are also not coincidental (10,6% totally). These countries have suffered from military operations of the USA and their allies. The sole fact that these countries are put in the same list shows that the USA is represented in the negative light. The country is represented as an aggressive military power. It should also be pointed out that all the listed allies of the USA are also their military partners in NATO.

In publications from 2013 Russia is presented only in its political role. Western media views the situation differently, however, indicators of mentions are similar. This fact tells us that current events in the USA are as important as the events in Syria. During the conflict in Syria actions of the USA were based on intimidating Syrian government by the possibility of military operation without actually using the force which can lead to the assumption that actions of the USA were more political than military. At the same time Afghanistan, Iraq and Bosnia were mentioned, and these

are the countries that experienced military involvement from the USA. Nevertheless, the USA is much less represented as military state in the media texts (6 % total). In the publications Russia is also represented only in conjunction with political allies.

The study has shown that Russia media notes representation of Syria and the USA as military-political subjects. Western media dwells on representing participants of the military conflict in the political light.

Analysis of the variable "NAMES"

In order to conduct content analysis of the text according to the parameter of "NAMES" students calculated total quantity of all personal names mentioned in the text; afterwards the data was analyzed and systemized.

The first step was to indicate media's orientation. In order to do that, personal names of politicians and other participants were divided according to their countries of representation.

Dominant variables were indicated which allowed to sort variables according to the degree of importance.

Russian publications showed the following results: primary group (group of personal names) consisted of the USA (32 %), secondary – of Syria (21 %) and Russia (19 %), tertiary – of France (8 %) and the UK (18 %).

Western publications painted a different picture. Primary group included the USA (46 %), secondary – Syria (18 %) and the UK (18 %), tertiary – Russia (10 %).

Primary group of personal names both in Russian and western media consists of the USA which pays a lot of attention to actions of the USA from both sides. Systematization of names according to the used method allows identifying real players participating in the events, which is different from the analysis of the variable "COUNTRY". These players openly declare their position instead of passively supporting it.

Thus, we can conclude that the real participants are Syria and NATO countries (the USA, the UK and France). This tendency may be traced in all publications that describe the crisis in Syria independent from their topic and country of origin.

The second step is defining categories of mentioned politicians and other participants. In order to do that the following 3-level classification is applied: the first level consists of presidents, heads of state; the second level is government officials, diplomats, statesmen, etc.; the third level consists of people outside of power – experts, correspondents, etc.

Political significance of the conflict according to specific media may be defined by how often politicians and participants of the process of different level are mentioned. The more important the person who pays attention to the process is, the more significant is the event.

Top officials are mentioned both in Russian and foreign articles with the same frequency (40 % of all mentions). Bureaucratic apparatus appears more often in the western articles (56 %) than in the Russian articles (50 %). Besides, Russian publications mention personal names from the "OTHERS" category significantly more frequently – 9,3 % on the contrast with 5,6 % in the foreign texts.

More than half of the names mentioned in the text are the names of government officials, however, quite a big percentage comprises of the top state's officials (about 40 %) which makes this event global. Similar number of mentions both in Russian and western publications shows that magnitude and media image of the Syrian conflict is represented in similar manner. It should be specifically mentioned that overthrown dictators from the past appear in the texts: Saddam Hussein and Adolf Hitler (in the western texts) and Muammar Kaddafi and Saddam Hussein (in Russian texts).

The third step is the analysis of names and their sorting according to their spheres of activity. In the western texts 17 participants of 23 are either politicians or statesmen, 6 names represent fields that are not directly connected to power (reporters, scientists, civilians) and comprise 7,25 % of all mentions of the names. Military men are not represented.

Russian publications represent 34 names, 22 of them are of statesmen and politicians from different countries, 5 are of military men (4 of them – American) and 7 are representatives of professions that are not directly connected with politics and war. Military men and civilians comprise 8 % of all mentions each.

Analysis of the variable "PARTICIPANTS"

In order to reflect the meaning whilst analyzing characters of the publication or the participants, students who conducted investigation tried to reflect how different publications called them specifically. The names were divided according to the objects; 5 main name groups were defined. In the present analysis those groups were processed in the order of appearance. Units of reference that comprised every group, were put systematically, their percentage in the group was calculated and classified according to the meaning. The following 3 group topics were identified: 1) political – includes units connected with bureaucratic apparatus of the state, its political parties, unions, etc.; 2) military – includes unions that mainly serve military or reactionary purpose (e.g.: "rebels", "rioters", "terrorists"); 3) national/civic – "non-governmental unions that are not connected with military or political activity directly" (e.g.: "Americans", experts, inspection, opposition). This analysis has shown that in the western sources referential units with political topic comprise 61 % of all units (38 % – opposition, 4 % – terrorists, 4 % – military islamists). In the Russian publications the division is the following: 62 % – political (opposition – 42 %, opponents of the regimen – 18 %, revolutionaries – 2 %), military – 38 % (unlawful combatants – 12 %, rebels – 14 %, terrorists – 6 %, rioters – 2 %). Russian and western publications are similar in their representation of opposition. Ratio of military to political topics is the following: West – 61 % to 39 %; Russia – 62 % to 38 %.

A lot more vivid emotional expressions were discovered in Russian texts (e.g., "revolutionaries", "rioters", "terrorists") in comparison with western texts which indicates that the events were perceived as real.

The concept of *"Syrian government"* was studied separately taking in consideration variable's contents and meaning of texts.

The following conclusion was made based on referential units in groups. In the western sources 69 % of units are political (power – 31 %, government – 18 %, official Damascus – 6 %, regimen – 10 %, president of Syria – 4 %) and 21 % are military (troops – 20 %, army – 4 %, soldiers – 2 %, government forces – 2 %, military men – 2 %), correspondingly.

In Russian publications 71 % of all units can be classified as political (regimen – 30 %, government – 26 %, Syrians – 11 %, official Damascus – 4 %). 29 % of units are military (troops – 19 %, army – 7 %, soldiers – 4 %).

Comparison of percentage ratio between governmental and military referential units shows that conflict's representation does not have significant discrepancy in Russian and foreign texts by the parameter of mentioning Syrian government as a participant in the events: 69 % to 21 % in foreign texts and 71 % to 29 % in Russian texts.

An extra category appears in the description of *the USA* as a country – a category of *nation*.

Units with political content prevail both in Russian (56 %) and in western texts (78 %). Contents of units connected with military subjects in Russian sources are higher than in foreign (22 %). Russian sources use such unit as "Americans" (17 %) which represents people of the USA. This unit is special as it shows individualized attitude to every nation thus giving it certain emotional weight. It shows the level of engagement of non-political subjects and increases their connection with the real world.

Concept of "Russia"

Russia with its subjects is rarely mentioned in western media, however, there are still some regularities: western media does not pay attention to details and consider only generalized image of Russia, while Russian media pays a lot of attention to diplomats ("Lavrov" and "diplomats" comprise 50 %).

Due to a small number of unique units of representation of Russia both in western and Russian media, in their study students noted detailed reflection of US participants from different publications' point of view.

American participants are represented equally in both sources – in 6 units. Foreign texts are practically uniform – 5 out of 6 units are political. In comparison Russian texts are very diverse: 3 units are political, 2 – military and 1 is national.

We may conclude that representation's detalization as well as frequency of mentions of every participant points to participant's importance in these events.

In the category of "*International relations*" all units of analysis are political.

Variable “the UN” in western materials is mostly comprised of civilian units (55 %), while 45 % are political. In Russian texts 11 % are political, 11 % are military, while civilian units also prevail here (78 %).

Concluding the review of such a big variable as “PARTICIPANTS”, average value was calculated for all parts of the variable.

High detalization of the variable or the category in comparison with others shows bigger importance of this parameter. It should be noted that given quite similar results, Russian media uses more diverse references to describe the category of “national/civilian” while western media uses the category of “political”.

Western resources better detailize the concept of “Syrian government”, therefore, they pay a lot of attention to it. Secondary concepts are the USA, opposition and the UN. Russia and international unions are put in the third place. These results may be interpreted in the following manner: Syrian government is the hero of the day, it is the most active, the most dominant force in the conflict, while the USA, the UN and opposition have some kind of interconnection between them.

In Russian media variables are divided in the following manner (according to their degree of representation): “opposition - Syrian government” are primary; “the USA - the UN” are secondary; “Russia - international unions” are tertiary.

This distribution is smooth without any spikes. The first two variables are close in their meaning which may point to equal level of engagement in the global process. In comparison to western texts powers of participants here are in balance which may point to their representation as equals in political and military sense.

Analysis of the variable “ORGANIZATIONS”

Ranking in the most mentioned organizations in Russian and foreign media is the same. The key organizations in texts of foreign and Russian publications are the USA and the UN. Therefore, it is crucial to analyze them carefully. Russian and foreign media focuses on different points while talking about the USA and the UN.

In the western sources: 1) the USA as organization in western media is comprised by bureaucratic apparatus (president’s administration, Congress, the White House) and military departments (Pentagon, CIA, Navy). Therefore, the number of mentions is 15 and 5. 2) the UN is divided according to functions of its agencies: generalized bureaucratic apparatus (the UN) and agency responsible for sustaining world peace and safety (Security Council). Number of mentions is 37 and 9, correspondingly. Mentions of bureaucratic/solely diplomatic side prevail (3 times for the USA, 4 times for the UN).

In Russian sources: Division in both points is similar. Thus, when talking about the USA organizations, more attention is paid to the military side: bureaucratic apparatus is mentioned 7 times, military departments – 12 times. When talking about the UN attention is divided in the following manner: bureaucratic apparatus - 12 mentions, military (Safety Council) – 14 times. One side is much heavier than the other, military apparatus of the USA is mentioned twice as often, while between Safety Council and the UN Safety Council prevails.

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) being military-political block that unites most European countries was not mentioned at all.

During the review of international non-government organizations two organizations were mentioned: in the western media “Human Rights Watch” (an international non-governmental organization that conducts research and advocacy on human rights) is mentioned 3 times. Russian publications mention “Doctors without Borders” twice (an international non-governmental organization that provides medical help to people who were affected by military conflicts and natural disasters).

These organizations have different purposes - the first one helps to fight for rights, the second is humanitarian. Clear division between the countries also shows meaningful approach in coverage of the conflict. Western publications highlight defending human rights, fighting for justice, while for Russian publications the main topic is helping survivors of the conflict. Two levels of reflection can be easily distinguished - international and local which confirms the idea that the conflict is represented as real political and military confrontation.

Taking these two positions as an example, it should be noted that the focus in meaning is shifted differently in foreign and Russian publications. Syrian sources dwell on the official side and

organization's position, while Russian ones' dwell on the military side which may be interpreted as different understanding of the conflict. Western sources mention it 13 times. All mentions of organizations are connected with Russian international politics (Ministry of foreign affairs, Russian Federation, State Duma's Council of foreign affairs).

UK government is distinguished in the western sources as a separate field of organizations (Parliament, House of Lords, Government), it is mentioned 3 times, while in Russian sources the UK is mentioned only once as the ministry of foreign affairs in conjunction with other international participants (ministry of foreign affairs of France, Germany, etc.).

Number of organizations represented in the texts indicates that scientific organizations are represented by expert evaluations in order to reinforce chosen opinion and to increase text's *validity*.

Russian sources mention much more research organizations (Center of transformation of political systems (Moscow State University), Center of socio-political investigations, Cranfield Forensic Institute (in Great Britain), etc.) than western sources (International Institute for Strategic Studies); 5 and 1 mentions, correspondingly.

Analysis of the variable "NAMES OF THE EVENTS".

Names of the events that are described in specific texts were picked according to author's naming. 79 units were then divided into the following topics: 1) Conflict in Syria by itself - contradiction between the parties, inner processes in Syria; 2) Military operation in Syria - plans and discussions of international players that participate in military invasion to the Syrian conflict; 3) gas attack in the suburb of Damascus (Ghouta) which took place on the 21st of August, 2013.

Mentions of conflict's name prevail in texts from both sides. However, ratios are significantly different: western publications name it more often (by 21 %) than Russian media sources which show that western sources pay more attention to the topic of inner affairs in Syria).

In the group of units "conflict" Russian media tends to use names that characterize inner political position of Syria: "conflict" and "crisis" (59 %); cluster of units (34 %) with such key words as "war", "civil war" and "information war" is indicated separately.

Western sources also indicate a cluster with the word "war" and put it on the first position (64 %), while the inner political cluster of units is in the second position (28 %).

Military operation group is divided into units with militarist meaning (invasion, intervention, intrusion, operation) and the ones that are neutral, impersonal, lacking any connotations (scenario, act). The majority of names in Russian and western publications describe operation in militarist terms (58 % – Russian, 100 % – Western).

On the one hand, when reviewing the names given to gas attack in Ghouta, western publications are prone to emotional expressions: "mass murder", "carnage of innocent", "mad attack". On the other hand, Russian publications tend to use accusatory representations: media calls the attack "the act of crime", "terrorism", "criminal actions".

Analysis of the variable "PROCESSES"

89 units naming the processes are detected in texts.

Western media represents processes in the following manner: 1. Destruction of chemical weapons (e.g.: "destruction of known chemical weapons and plants", "destruction of Syrian weapons", "weapons withdrawal abroad"); 2. Political processes in Syria (e.g.: "opposition splitting", "increasing growth in the number of islamists", "rising of the political wave of extremism").

Russian media presents processes differently in the following ways:

1) by showing processes that are initiated by the foreign forces (e.g.: "intervention in the conflict", "US combat ships started relocation", "combat ships are drawn to the Syrian shores");

2) by highlighting the UN's activity in the conflict, mostly in connection with investigations of the reasons behind the gas attack (e.g.: "investigating the incident", "the UN commission's investigation", "studying messages about the chemical attacks", "arrival of the observers"; general military actions in Syria;

3) by talking about negotiations – this group includes units connected with the process of peaceful negotiations: discussions themselves (e.g.: "phone consultations", "negotiations", "urgent meetings", "American-Russian meeting", etc.), indicating the purpose of negotiations ("preventing action of force", "political transformation into legitimate government").

Specification of described processes in western and Russian media differs. Western media uses specific expressions that describe military actions (e.g.: “strikes”, “using military power”, “attacks”, “air bombings”).

Russian publications pay special attention to the civil war dynamics (“military actions”, “confrontations”, “mass carnage of the Kurds”, “active actions against unlawful combatants” – In Russian ‘unlawful combatant’ is used as one word? ‘boevik’), including such aspect as informational war (“growing tension”, “attack ads”, “informational attack”). Actions of the opposition that support combat readiness were highlighted separately (“getting weapons promised by Europeans and Americans”, “getting help from Lebanon”, “getting back home after training”).

Analysis of the variable “ACTIONS”

Participants’ actions were systemized in order to discover differences in representation of political military units (“actions”) in the text. Units of analysis were grouped according to political views of the participants.

As a result, a difference has been discovered between foreign and Russian publications. The former mostly contain political actions, while the latter are mostly military (difference is 9 %).

Foreign texts have shown that the USA may follow American’s representations as a mighty power with practically undeniable military potential that surpasses potential of other participants. Indicators of governmental actions of Syria (25 %) and opposition (13 %) may be interpreted as Syrian troops domination in the war, therefore, as a weakness of discriminated position.

Political activity is evenly distributed between all participants of the event excluding opposition (3 %). Low potential indicates opposition’s incapability or unwillingness to lead a political dialogue and may show lack of diplomatic skills. However, it may also be the evidence of lively diplomatic polylogue with the USA being the leader.

Russian texts show situation from the different angle: the UN dominates in politics which means that this organization is represented as a main authority in solving the conflict. Later on diplomats from Russia and foreign countries take action and carry out negotiations or try to do it acknowledging that the UN is a leader. The USA is dominating the military aspect which may be explained by their plans of invading Syria. Opposition is on the same level of activity as is the Syrian government which indicates that both parties are perceived as equals (if they lead equal military actions, they are equal in power).

Analysis of variable “EVALUATIONS”

In this module evaluative judgments were collected due to their “evaluation” nature. Evaluations were divided by objects of expression and tone (positive, neutral, negative). Based on analysis results, study group came to the conclusion that general tendencies in evaluation of events and participants of conflict do not have significant differences. It means that evaluation image of conflict is the same both in Russia and in the West.

5. Conclusion

Gas attack in Ghouta is evaluated as neutral-negative in western publications (solely negative in Russian publications) which was interpreted as distancing from the conflict. At the same time discrepancy in the views of the allies may be noticed. Starkly negative evaluations of the concepts of “gas attacks” and “western allies” were detected in the Russian publications. Concept of “Russia” is evaluated either neutrally or positively. Variables “opposition” and “the USA” are described in neutral to negative tone. Positive evaluations prevail in describing “Syria”. No distinguished peaks are discovered in the number of evaluations of every parameter.

Application of the method is advisable in studying media materials that reflect the current stage of solving the conflict in Syria. Content analysis of the materials according to the suggested algorithm that contain identification of mentioned concepts, units of analysis and quantitative units will allow to see the dynamics in conflict development, to identify dominant events, to compare western and Russian attitude to its representation.

Learning the skill of conducting content analysis of the media texts will help to significantly increase critical thinking and media competence of students, to understand mechanisms of ideological influence and value-based contents of specific media texts and also to increase communicative culture of students.

6. Acknowledgements

This reported study was funded by Saint-Petersburg State University for the research grant 26520757.

References

Alieva, 2015 – *Alieva, D.S.* (2015). Media coverage of current tendencies of world wars (on the example of military conflict in Syria). *Science Time*. No 3 (15): 18-21.

Bakuleva, Anisimova, 2015 – *Bakuleva, K., Anisimova, T.* (2015). Media competence and political perception in modern Russian society, *Proceedings of International Psychological Applications Conference and Trend,* 2-4 May, 2015, Ljubljana, Slovenia: 327-329.

Buckingham, 2009 – *Buckingham, D.* (2009). The Future of Media Literacy in the Digital Age: Same Challenges for Policy and Practice. *Medienimpulse,* N 2: 69-82.

Borujerdi, 2015 – *Borujerdi: the USA declared proxy-war on Syria through terroristic organizations* (2015). *January 17. Syrian Arab News Agency*. URL: http://www.sana.sy /ru/?p=23512

Brinson, Stohl, 2012 – *Brinson, M., Stohl, M.* (2012). Media Framing of Terrorism: Implications for Public Opinion, Civil Liberties, and Counterterrorism Policies. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*. Vol 5. No 4: 270-290.

Content analysis… – *Content analysis as a research method of media texts*. URL: http://www.nt.am/newsday.php?p=0,c=0,t=0,r=0,year=2011,month=05,day=23,shownews=1043 500,LangID=7

Dmitriev, 2005 – *Dmitriev, I.* (2005). Content analysis: essence, tasks, procedures. URL: https://psyfactor.org/lib/k-a.htm

Dobrosklonskaya, 2008 – *Dobrosklonskaya, T.G.* (2008). Media linguistics: system approach to studying the language of media (Contemporary English media speech). Moscow: Flinta, Nauka, 263 p.

Egorov, 2016 – *Egorov, P.M.* (2016). Analysis of Yakutsk students' opinion on the military conflict in Syria. *Science and modern life*. No 42: 65–70.

Eid, 2013 – *Eid, M.* (2013). The New Era of Media and Terrorism, *Studies in Conflict, Terrorism*, Vol. 36, No7: 609-615.

Eid, 2014 – *Eid, M.* (2014). The Media Amid Terrorism and Counterterrorism. *Terrorism and Political Violence,* No 26: 842–854.

Farwell, Arakelian, 2013 – *Farwell, J.P., Arakelian, D. A.* (2013). Better Syria Option: Cyber War. The National Interest. September 6. URL: http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/better-syria-option-cyber-war-9003.

Fedorov, 2007 – *Fedorov A.V.* (2007). Content analysis during media education classes for students. *Researcher*. No 11–12: 85–100.

Hassan, 2014 – *Hassan K.* (2014). The Role of Private Electronic Media in Radicalising Pakistan. *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs,* Vol. 103, No 1: 65-81.

Klausen, 2015 – *Klausen, J.* (2015). Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq, *Studies in Conflict , Terrorism*, Vol. 38, No 1: 1-22.

Lobanov, Moisee, 2015 – *Lobanov, K.N., Moiseev, V.V.* (2015). Civil war in Syria and Russian geopolitical interests in the Middle East. *Central Russian Journal of Social Sciences*. No 6. Vol. 10: 103–106.

Mahnev, 2014 – *Mahnev, S.D.* (2014) How Syrian conflict threats the national security of the Russian Federation. *Vestnik of Lobachevsky University of Nizhni Novgorod*, No 1 (2): 345–350.

Mitina, Evdokimenko, 2008 – *Mitina, O.V., Evdokimenko, A.S.* (2008) Methods of text analysis: methodological basics and implementation of programs. *Bulletin of the South Ural State University. Series "Psychology",* № 11: 29–37.

Noskova, 2014 – *Noskova, I.A.* (2014). Informational war against Syria. *Criminology: yesterday, today, tomorrow*. No 1 (32): 101–103.

Podrabinek, 2013 – *Podrabinek, A.* (2013). Syria: view from the Russian opposition. *Institute of Modern Russia.* 17.09.2013. http://imrussia.org/ru/%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B0% D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0/%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B8%D 1%82%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0/1554-syria-a-view-from-therussian-opposition

Riad, 2013 – *Riad, H.* (2013). Electronic media and their role in the war against Syria. *New Eastern Outlook: Russian electronic journal.* URL: https://ru.journal-neo.org/2013/12/04/e-lektronny-e-sredstva-massovoj-informatsii-i-ih-rol-v-vojne-protiv-*sirii/*

Rich, 2013 – *Rich, P.* (2013). Understanding Terror, Terrorism, and Their Representations in Media and Culture. *Studies in Conflict , Terrorism*, Vol. 36, No 3: 255-277.

Sharp, Blanchard, 2012 – *Sharp, D.M., Blanchar, D. K.* (2012). Unrest in Syria and U.S. Sanctions Against the Asad Regime. March 26. *CRS Report for Congress,* Washington DC. Congressional Research Service.

Sharp, Blanchard, 2012 – *Sharp, J. M., Blanchard, Ch. M.* (2012). Syria: Unrest and U.S. Policy. May 24, *Congressional Research Service*. URL: http://fpc.state.gov/documents /organization/191927.pdf

Silverblatt, Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2016 – *Silverblatt, A., Fedorov, A., Levitskaya, A.* (2016). Media literacy. Keys to interpretation of media messages. DIMLE.

Stepanenko, Lysenko, 2016 – *Stepanenko, S.G., Lysenko, A.I.* (2016). Students' representation of Russian involvement in the military conflict in Syria. *Scientific works of Kuban State University*. No 5.

Stepanova, 2012 – *Stepanova, E.A.* (2012). Military conflict in Syria and Russian politics. *Pathways to Peace and Security*. 2012. No 2 (43): 7–25.

Worsnop, 2013 – *Worsnop C.* (2013). Some Thoughts on Assessment in Media Education. *The Journal of Media Literacy*. 2013. Vol. 60, N 1– 2.

Zeng, Tahat, 2012 – *Zeng, L., Tahat, K.* (2012). Picturing terrorism through Arabic lenses: a comparative analysis of Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya. *Asian Journal of Communication*. Vol. 22, No. 5: 433-448.