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LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATION OF TRAUMA IN CONTEMPORARY UKRAINIAN WAR POETRY: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction. The problem of representing trauma in language remains one of the central issues in contemporary humanities. Psychological trauma affects memory, identity, emotional regulation, and the ability to construct a coherent narrative about one's experience. In clinical and psychological studies, trauma is commonly associated with events that disrupt a person's basic sense of safety and continuity. Such events include war, forced displacement, violence, loss, and social catastrophe [1; 15]. In the humanities, trauma is studied not only as an individual psychological state, but also as a cultural and narrative phenomenon that shapes artistic expression, collective memory, and literary form [4].

Poetry is especially important for representing traumatic experience because it does not require a fully linear narrative structure. Unlike conventional prose narration, poetry can express emotional intensity through fragmentation, rhythm, silence, repetition, metaphor, and condensed imagery. These features make poetic language suitable for representing experiences that resist direct explanation or chronological organization. In trauma poetry, linguistic form often reflects the psychological structure of traumatic memory itself: broken, repetitive, sensory, and difficult to integrate into a coherent story [9].

The relevance of this topic is particularly strong in the context of contemporary Ukrainian literature. Since the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine in 2014 and especially after the full-scale invasion in 2022, Ukrainian poetry has actively responded to war, displacement, occupation, loss of home, destruction of cities, and collective suffering. Poetic texts written in this context combine documentary detail with symbolic meaning. They record individual emotions and, at the same time, participate in the formation of collective memory [18].

The aim of this paper is to systematize the theoretical foundations for the linguistic analysis of trauma poetry and to define the main linguistic features through which traumatic experience is represented in contemporary Ukrainian war poetry.

Theoretical Background. In trauma studies, trauma is often understood as an experience that exceeds the ordinary mechanisms of perception, memory, and narration. Cathy Caruth argues that traumatic experience is not always fully grasped at the moment of occurrence and may return later through intrusive memories, images, and repetitions [6]. Judith Herman emphasizes that trauma affects psychological integrity and can disrupt the individual's connection with self, others, and the surrounding world [8].

From the perspective of narrative psychology, traumatic experience can disturb the structure of autobiographical memory. Conway and Pleydell-Pearce describe autobiographical memory as a complex system that connects individual episodes with broader life themes. When trauma occurs, this system may be disrupted, and memories can remain fragmented or disconnected from the person's wider life story. This explains why trauma narratives often contain broken chronology, repetition, sensory details, and difficulties in verbal organization [7].

Narrative processing plays an important role in the interpretation of trauma. Bruner and McAdams argue that people understand their lives through stories that connect past events, present identity, and expectations for the future [5; 12]. When trauma interrupts this narrative continuity, the individual may need to reconstruct meaning through language. Pennebaker and Seagal also emphasize that forming a story about a difficult experience can support emotional and cognitive processing. In this context, poetic writing may become a form of symbolic organization of fragmented experience [16].

The concept of meaning-making is also important for trauma research. Park explains that stressful and traumatic events often challenge a person's global beliefs about the world, justice, safety, and personal control. As a result, individuals try to reinterpret the event and integrate it into a renewed system of meaning. Poetry can contribute to this process by allowing emotional experience to be expressed indirectly through images, metaphors, rhythm, and symbolic structures [14].

Trauma Poetry as a Literary and Cultural Phenomenon. Trauma poetry is a form of poetic writing that represents the experience of psychological shock, violence, loss, displacement, or collective catastrophe. It develops at the intersection of literary studies, psychology, cultural studies, and linguistics. Such poetry often emerges after wars, genocides, political repression, forced migration, terrorist attacks, and natural disasters. In these contexts, poetry becomes not only an aesthetic form, but also a way of witnessing and preserving emotional memory [3; 20].

One of the central characteristics of trauma poetry is its connection with collective memory. Assmann defines cultural memory as a system through which societies preserve and transmit meaningful images of the past [4]. Poetic texts can function as carriers of this memory because they preserve not only facts but also emotional responses to historical events. In this sense, trauma poetry may document experiences that are personally lived and socially shared.

The contemporary Ukrainian poetic context clearly demonstrates this function. Ukrainian war poetry often includes images of destroyed cities, air raid sirens, shelters, evacuation, separation, military threat, ruined homes, and the loss of familiar life. These images are not abstract literary decorations. They are connected with concrete historical experience and therefore acquire the status of cultural signs. Toponyms such as Mariupol, Bucha, Irpin, Kharkiv, and other names of affected places can function as linguistic markers of collective trauma and resistance [17].

At the same time, trauma poetry does not merely reproduce suffering. It also creates a space for reflection, emotional articulation, and ethical witnessing. The poem can transform a chaotic experience into a communicative form. Even when the text remains fragmented, its very fragmentation may become meaningful because it reflects the psychological difficulty of speaking about trauma.

The linguistic representation of trauma in poetry occurs through several interconnected levels: lexical, syntactic, metaphorical, phonetic, pragmatic, and cultural [2].

At the lexical level, trauma poetry frequently uses emotionally charged vocabulary. Such words may directly name emotions, for example, fear, grief, pain, loneliness, despair, hope, or anger. They may also form semantic fields connected with danger, destruction, silence, darkness, body, memory, and loss. In poetic texts, emotionally marked vocabulary not only describes a psychological state but also creates the emotional atmosphere of the whole text.

Metaphor is one of the most powerful instruments for representing traumatic experience. In cognitive linguistics, metaphor is understood as a way of conceptualizing abstract experience through more concrete images [19]. Trauma is often represented through metaphors of wound, darkness, brokenness, cold, emptiness, fire, ruins, or silence. These images allow the poet to express experiences that may be difficult to describe directly. In Ukrainian war poetry, metaphors of home, road, shelter, night, earth, and destroyed space often carry both individual and national meanings.

Syntactic structure is another important marker of trauma in poetic discourse. Short sentences, incomplete constructions, abrupt breaks, repetitions, and disrupted word order can express emotional tension and narrative fragmentation. Such syntactic forms may imitate the broken rhythm of traumatic memory. They can also create the effect of hesitation, shock, or interrupted speech. In this way, syntax becomes not only a grammatical structure, but also a means of psychological representation.

Repetition is especially significant in trauma poetry. It may reflect the repetitive nature of traumatic memory, in which the same image, sound, place, or emotion recurs. Repetition may appear at the level of words, phrases, lines, sounds, or images. In poetry, it can intensify emotional impact and create a sense of obsession, return, or unresolved experience.

Rhythm and sound organization also contribute to the emotional force of trauma poetry. Irregular rhythm, short lines, pauses, alliteration, assonance, and sound repetition can strengthen the text's affective perception. In some poems, rhythm may create a sense of anxiety or instability; in others, it may produce restraint, numbness, or silence.

Cultural context plays a crucial role in the interpretation of emotional language. Wierzbicka and Pavlenko emphasize that emotions are expressed and understood through culturally specific linguistic patterns [20; 15]. Therefore, the analysis of Ukrainian trauma poetry should take into account the cultural meanings of images, symbols, historical references, and place names. In the wartime Ukrainian context, words such as home, shelter, siren, road, mother, city, and silence may carry meanings that go beyond their dictionary definitions.

The theoretical analysis shows that trauma poetry should be studied as a complex linguistic and cultural phenomenon. Its form is closely connected with the psychological characteristics of traumatic experience. Fragmentation, repetition, sensory density, metaphorical compression, and disrupted syntax are not random stylistic choices. They can be interpreted as textual markers of trauma-related perception, memory, and emotional processing.

Contemporary Ukrainian war poetry is especially important for this type of analysis because it combines individual testimony with collective historical experience. The poetic speaker may describe personal fear, grief, or loss, but these emotions are often placed within a wider national and cultural context. This creates a dual structure of meaning: the poem speaks about a private experience and at the same time about a shared social reality [13].

Another important feature of Ukrainian trauma poetry is the combination of documentary detail and symbolic imagery. References to real cities, streets, shelters, trains, ruins, sirens, or dates create a documentary layer of the text. At the same time, these details often become symbols of vulnerability, endurance, memory, and resistance. This combination allows the poem to function both as witness and as artistic interpretation.

The analysis of trauma poetry can therefore be organized around four main dimensions. First, narrative disruption should be examined. This includes broken chronology, fragmented

structure, abrupt transitions, incomplete statements, and the absence of a stable narrative sequence.

Second, emotive and sensory vocabulary should be analyzed. This includes words and images connected with fear, loss, bodily perception, sound, darkness, space, and memory.

Third, metaphorical and symbolic representation should be considered. Special attention should be paid to metaphors of destruction, home, road, silence, body, and natural elements.

Fourth, cultural-memory markers should be identified. These include toponyms, references to historical events, culturally significant symbols, collective pronouns, and documentary details that connect the individual poem with the broader experience of Ukrainian society [11].

This framework can be used in further research for the close reading of contemporary Ukrainian war poems. It makes it possible to connect linguistic form with psychological meaning and cultural context.

Conclusion. Trauma poetry is a significant object of applied linguistic and literary research because it demonstrates how language represents experiences that are emotionally intense, fragmented, and difficult to express directly. Theoretical studies of trauma, memory, narrative identity, and cultural memory show that traumatic experience can disturb autobiographical continuity and affect the structure of verbal expression.

Poetic language offers specific resources for representing such experience. Through emotive vocabulary, metaphor, syntax, rhythm, repetition, symbolic imagery, and cultural references, poetry can express fear, grief, loss, displacement, and hope. In contemporary Ukrainian war poetry, these linguistic means take on greater importance because they are connected to the collective experience of war and the formation of cultural memory.

The paper has outlined a theoretical framework for further analysis of trauma poetry. The proposed dimensions – narrative disruption, emotive and sensory language, metaphorical-symbolic representation, and cultural-memory markers – can guide the study of contemporary Ukrainian poems written in response to war. Such an approach allows trauma poetry to be understood not only as an artistic form but also as a linguistic space where personal experience, cultural memory, and historical witness intersect.

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