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ON A LINGUIST'S MANDATE IN WRITING CONCLUSIONS REQUESTED BY THE LAW-ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES

The present paper addresses the issue of establishing the limits of competence of a linguist writing the studies upon request by the law-enforcement authorities. It tackles the issues of statuses of symbols that function in hate speech in conflict texts with the elements of verbal extremism.

Keywords: hate speech, conflict text, limits of competence of a linguist.

One of the tasks for an expert writing a study upon request by the law-enforcement authorities is to give answers to the posed questions within his/her competence. Thus, in the process of linguistic studies a philologist may only analyse a linguistic form of utterances. Verification of content of utterances, identification of psychological impact methods, image analysis etc. do not fall within his/her competence. However, it is not uncommon when the ontology of some utterances would set an expert thinking of which kind of study exactly should be undertaken, and does the linguistic form of a text always require a solely linguistic commentary. It should be noted, that prescribing a comprehensive study, which is envisaged to result in offering the expert opinions from various fields of booklore, may not be considered a nostrum in this case, since it implies that, though there is one and certain subject for the study, the conclusions by every expert shall be presented as a separate text containing the study confined by methods of certain scientific field.

Let us consider some disputable cases we were prompted by to write the present paper.

When responding to the request of local office of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation in regard to linguistic study of the leaflet headed "the Jews go up the tiles – the Russian nation dies" we found out that the utterance we qualify as a judgemental opinion with practical reference «*Four letters on the dreidel represent the cabbalistic symbols denoting the four historic empires the Jews are playing with as they wish*», contains an inaccuracy. This inaccuracy is contained in the fragment with practical reference «*letters on the dreidel represent the cabbalistic symbols denoting the four historic empires*». According to the Encyclopedia of Symbols by E. Sheynin, one of the Chanukah symbols is a tetrahedral "sevivon" spinning top [6,

p. 253]. The Russian Wikipedia contains the "Дрейдл" entry and there is English entry for "Dreidel" [1], providing other names for this spinning top (Yiddish: לדיירד dreydl plural: dreydlekh, Hebrew: פוןביבס Sevivon) and it is confirmed that children do play with it as a Chanukah toy.

The names of the symbols are of particular interests here, which, in the opinion of the leaflet's author, are representing *the four historic empires*. As such, we found no dictionaries, encyclopaedias or any other sources confirming that symbols on the dreidel sides really denote the empires. According to the abovementioned «Encyclopedia» and «Wikipedia», the four symbols are the four letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The following information is given in the English «Dreidel» entry of «Wikipedia»: נ (Nun), ג (Gimel), ה (Hei), ש (Shin), which together form the acronym for "נודג שיה" (Nes Gadol Hayah Sham – "a great miracle happened there") [1].

Possibly, author of the leaflet was not aware of meanings of the four symbols. Since it is difficult to suppose what exactly were those four empires meant by the author, we may suspect that he had correlated the four symbols with the four cardinal directions – north, east, south and west. Presumably, with some information on the dreidel symbols the author let himself fantasize a bit and distort the information deliberately having mentioned some empires, which assertedly are *spinned and played with by the Jews as they wish*. Therefore, the information on a child's play with the dreidel was presented by the author as the whole world, all the countries being manipulated by the Jews.

In the course of analysing this utterance from the leaflet we asked ourselves the following questions: Does a linguist have to discover the meaning of letters on the dreidel, which in the text goes as «*Four*

letters on the dreidel represent the cabbalistic symbols denoting the four historic empires the Jews are playing with as they wish» without even mentioning what those four letter were? Could an expert in religious confessions be involved in discovering the meaning of these symbols? And who should decide on what kind of the text study is required – should it always be a person having legal education, a judge, for instance?

The necessity in involving an expert in religious confessions also comes to mind when reading the text of a leaflet headed «Whom the "Fathers" of the Church are employed by?», which was submitted for a study by the same law-enforcement authority. In the given leaflet there is an utterance *Hasidic sect Habad*, which may be classified as a judgemental opinion with practical reference or as a statement of fact depending on how an expert in religious confessions or political science would define a status of the Habad organization. A linguist, however, faces a challenging task: to define whether the word *sect* was used in a proper or a figurative meaning. When analysing this word we were guided by the New Dictionary of Russian Language by T.F. Yefremova, where one of the definitions gave a direct meaning 'A religious community dissented from the established church', the second was a figurative meaning and gave 'A clannish group of persons retreated in their narrow group interests'. The latter meaning is labelled *infml* (informal, colloquial) [4, p. 578]. Thus, if author of the leaflet used the word *sect* in its direct meaning, the utterance represents a statement of fact. If however, the word was used in the figurative meaning, the utterance becomes a judgemental opinion with practical reference, and stipulates the necessity of performing a linguistic study with respect to degree and nature of the negative connotation.

Materials of the magazine headed «WinterAttack zine #3 (Extreme right peri-



figure 1

НЕ  ЕГОЛЬ

odical)», submitted for a study by the same law-enforcement authority, contain various onyms, the graphic presentation of which made us think of the necessity to perform not only a linguistic, but a semiological analysis as well, which would help understand the status of the symbols in question, and whether they are letters, abbreviations, symbols or whatever they represent.

Speaking of status of symbols, we would like to take the liberty of describing the two tendencies occurring in materials of the pro-fascist orientation. Today, the graffiti, leaflets and radical magazines show the growing intention of not using the fascist swastika as an individual element but rather as a paralinguistic tool serving as a graphic design to an utterance. This instance stipulates a transition of message from the swastika directly to

the utterance itself (correspondingly, the significance of the utterance is amplified at both textual and subtextual levels) [3]. It should be noted however, that the revealed tendency does not imply that there is a total renouncing the swastika by the authors of pro-fascist texts.

This tendency is also revealed in the

names of the extreme right music bands and in the common text design of the discussed magazine (see Fig. 1 and 2).

The second tendency appears in the graffiti and involves refusing (although not totally) to decorate the walls with popular Nazi swastika and going for parallel substitution with ancient pa-

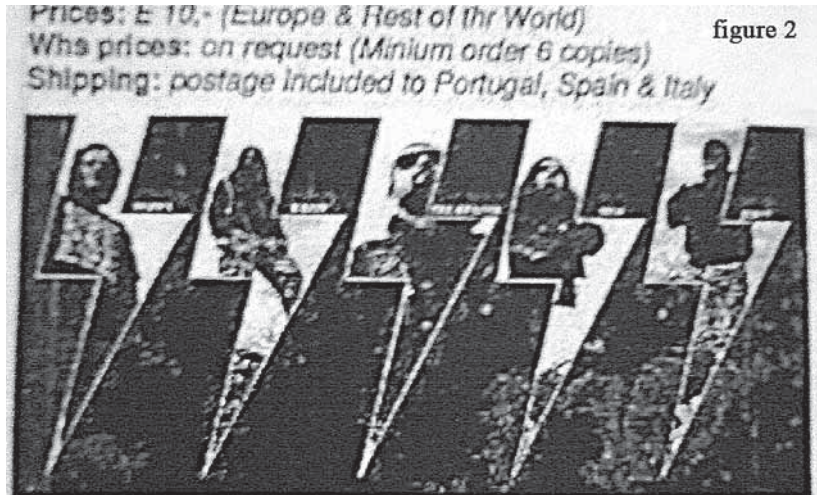
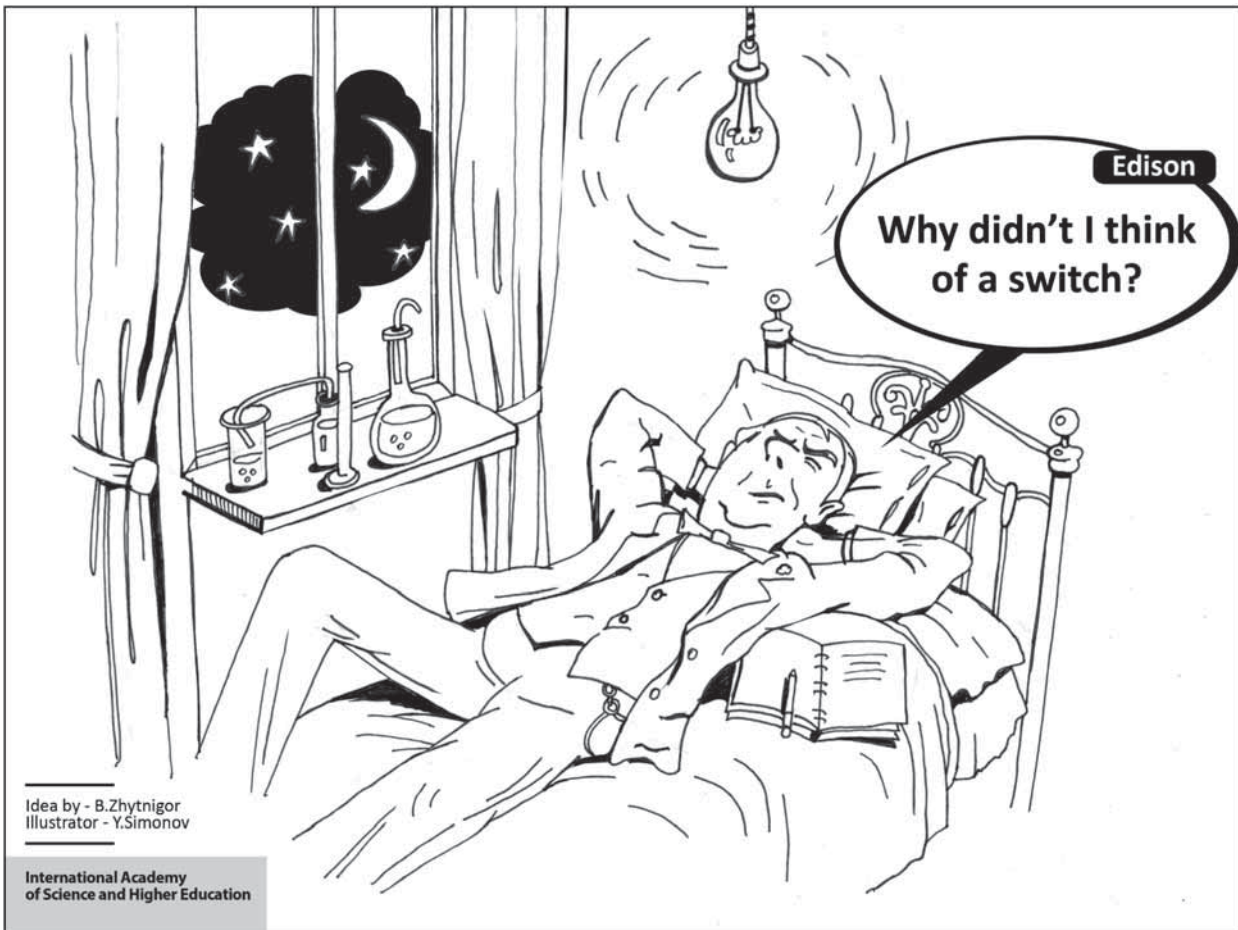
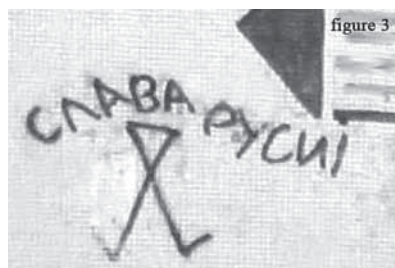


figure 2

Sturmkaiser project was born in 2003 to spread war and terror through its music. In the several years the band recorded one demo, one full-length (in 2 different editions, the first,





gan symbols, some of which represent symbols (e.g. triskele), and other being symbols and letters put together side-by-side (e.g. the Elder Futhark runes). As such, Figure 3 shows a snapshot of the wall inscribed with exclamation *GLORY TO RUS!* and the Odal rune above it. The Russian Wikipedia has the «Odal» entry describing the use of the Odal rune (ancient German *Opila* — «heritage», Anglo-Saxon *Oeþel*) in Nazi symbolism [5]. The fact that today not everybody would be motivated to search the Web (not even on the extremely popular Wikipedia) for the meaning of ancient Scandinavian rune, gives the neo-Nazis an opportunity to use the rune as a cryptographic sign understandable only by “the insiders”.

It does not take to be a psychologist to understand that such tendency is determined by the intention of those drawing on the walls and fences to escape responsibility (for vandalism, drawing the Nazi insignia etc.), while at the same time making a public statement on their viewpoints, and leaving a reminder for “the insiders” with the aim of supporting loyalty to their creed etc.

Although it is fairly easy to determine the causes of the second tendency, it seems very difficult for us to conclude on the conditions of occurrence of the first one. Yet, none of the relevant literature on the subject under study has provided us with any of possible origins of the first tendency, which we may have considered convincing.

The phrase and the symbol in Figure 4 demonstrate actualization of both tenden-



cies in the graffiti. Notably, this graffiti is still there on the wall of a secondary school right next to the place where the author of this paper lives, although the Nazi inscriptions and hate speech have been viciously and thoroughly painted out (by school officials?) with grey paint (see Figure 4: a grey part of the building to the left of the word *БЕГУЩИЕ* (*the running ones*)).

The word *БЕГУЩИЕ* (*the running ones*) serves as a substitute for the ancient triskele symbol and demonstrates actualization of the first tendency. Beside there is a swastika symbol enclosed in circle (in this case – the broken circle) resembling both Celtic and solar crosses, which is indicative of the second tendency actualization.

The studied word and the symbol were inscribed with the same handwriting by the same spray can as were the Nazi inscriptions and symbols, which had been straight away painted out with grey paint because of their barbarity and plainness to everyone. However, the word *БЕГУЩИЕ* (*the running ones*) and the cross-in-the-circle symbol were left untouched because of the function they fulfil (and not because the vandalism fighters ran out of paint!). Half-deciphered, inscribed with one word, and treated literally the triskele symbol, and the altered, simplified swastika started to function as cryptograms with two meanings: direct, literal and figurative (having a subtext only understandable among “the insiders”);.

The story with inscriptions near the school has its sequel and relates to a linguistic spray art of neo-Nazis after the law enforcement authorities had failed with investigative work. Such art lies in creating hybrids of cryptograms and monograms. Their analysis goes beyond the subject of the present paper.

Although the authors of such graffiti have no ambitions as to their artistry (the wall inscriptions are rough-and-ready and look primitive), the “art” itself is of interest for a variety of experts.

Surely, the mentioning of these tendencies would not resolve the issue of limits of competence for a linguist, but it just poses the pending questions: Is it justifiable to consign a preliminary semiological analysis before the linguistic study? Does a linguist’s competence cover the deciphering of pagan symbols, which formerly were used not only as symbols, but as the letters? Could an image inserted in letters (as in Figure 2) be a subject of linguistic analysis? Does a linguist’s competence cover the deciphering of numerical abbreviations of the pro-fascist subject-matter?

Putting it in a nutshell, we would state that despite the growing demand for linguistic analyses, the forensic linguistics shows a slow pace of development, while the number of disputable issues does not seem to decrease. Assuming the importance of their job, the experts, in the course of their analysing the utterances, are trying to give a professional opinion, which has to be as objective as possible; however, due to series of causes, such objectivity is very rarely to be achieved.

P.S. The materials mentioned above have been provided not only for a linguistic, but for a psychological study as well (apart from the text in Figure 4.). Everything that was mentioned in the present paper has no concern with materials of any level of classification.

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