

Negotiating mental struggle portrayal on social media using crosslinguistic corpus-assisted discourse analysis

With the spread of social media, discussing mental health has become less stigmatized. Narratives addressing mental struggles now appear even on the accounts of those influencers who previously chose to demonstrate a flawless image. The language and discursive strategies that influencers use to communicate mental health on various platforms both shape and reflect society's attitude to open mental health dialogue becoming a frequent object of research (e.g. McCosker, 2018).

The influencers' discourse of mental health exists beyond the scope of the English language. This phenomenon is also observed in Russian-speaking social media settings. However, the crosslinguistic aspect of digital mental health discourse is severely understudied. This project aims to fill this gap by exploring the variations in linguistic and discursive strategies that English and Russian-speaking influencers use to communicate mental health.

This project falls within the sphere of discourse analysis and engages with crosslinguistic discourse studies (Chow & Littlemore, 2022), while drawing upon previous corpus-assisted research of health discourse (Semino et al., 2017).

For the project, I analyzed Instagram lifestyle macro-influencers. Five Anglophone and five Russophone bloggers were selected based on recent ratings. The accounts were scraped and shaped into two corpora. Using #LancsBox for keyword, collocation, and concordances analysis, I identified and compared themes and patterns related to mental health in both languages. Most prominent posts on mental health were then analyzed qualitatively.

The analysis found that both languages attend to a variety of metaphorical concepts, such as JOURNEY or BREAK. The Russian data showed a higher degree of medicalization, whereas English discourse appeared to shape a more casual outlook. At the same time, English bloggers tend to nominalize mental health using more accurate language, while Russophone influencers often address mental health descriptively.

References

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Primary author: Ms SEVASTIANOVA, Aleksandra (University of Edinburgh)

Presenter: Ms SEVASTIANOVA, Aleksandra (University of Edinburgh)