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The Emergent Potential of the Concept of “Mental Virus”

ABSTRACT. *The concept of “mental virus” is not only an object of research of psychology and sociology but is also studied by linguistics due to the extreme importance of the structural and systemic correlations of verbal units used to construct the memes that can be considered as the basic means of the virus of the mind. It is common knowledge that modern social investigations take up exploring the problem of emotional impact on a person or a group of people and the methods of exerting this influence because it is turning into a political issue, especially considering the new realities bringing about neologisms like “cognitive war”, “mental virus”, “bio drone”, etc.*

The article is an attempt to analyze the field of emergence of the concept “mental virus” which allows the researcher to determine the potential of emergent constructions of the speech units used to exert psychological impact on a person or a wide audience, as long as almost all works that touch upon the problem of the virus of the mind are included to one degree or another into the context of influence upon the conscience of a single person or a large group of people.

The analysis of the field of emergence provides quite a complete picture regarding the areas and communicative situations in which this term can potentially be used. It should be also noted that the concept of “mental virus” is predominantly used in political, religious or corporate context.

The field of emergence is a model that allows determining a unified neural network between all structural elements of the field, which makes it possible to distinguish the transformational movements of both semantic and structural units from peripheral units into the center of the field of emergence and back, thus revealing their ideological basis in interpreting a communicative situation.

The use of the term “mental virus” in the context of speech units is attributed to the fact that these units produce almost the same effect on the object as biological or computer viruses, i.e., lead to a psychological stress, distortion of reality, information failure, negative emotions, etc.

KEYWORDS: *terminology, mental virus, field of emergence, emergent constructions, emergence, psychological impact, communicative situations, speech units, cognitive warfare, artificial intelligence, concepts, manipulative effect.*

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Эмерджентный потенциал понятия «вирус разума»

АННОТАЦИЯ. *Понятие «вирус разума» не только становится научной проблемой психологии и социологии, но и подлежит исследованию с точки зрения лингвистики ввиду чрезвычайной важности структурных и систематических взаимоотношений вербальных единиц, используемых для конструирования мемов, которые можно рассматривать как основное средство вируса разума. Общеизвестно, что в современных социальных исследованиях проблема эмоционального воздействия на человека или группы людей и способы этого воздействия становится предметом исследования ввиду того, что она превращается в политическую, особенно с учетом новых реалий, вызывающих к жизни новую терминологию типа «когнитивная война», «ментальный вирус», «биодрон» и т. д.*

Статья представляет собой попытку проанализировать поле эмерджентности возникновения понятия «мозговой вирус», позволяющее определить потенциал эмерджентных конструкций речевых единиц, используемых для оказания психологического воздействия на человека или широкую аудиторию, поскольку практически все исследования, затрагивающие проблему вируса разума, в той или иной степени включены в контекст воздействия на сознание человека или массы людей.

Анализ с точки зрения поля эмерджентности дает достаточно полную картину относительно направлений и коммуникативных ситуаций, в которых потенциально может использоваться этот термин. Также следует отметить, что понятие «вирус разума» преимущественно используется в политическом, религиозном или корпоративном контексте.

Поле эмерджентности — это модель, позволяющая определить единую нейронную сеть между всеми структурными элементами поля, что помогает выделить трансформационные движения как смысловых, так и струк-

турных единиц от периферийных единиц в центр поля эмерджентности и обратно, таким образом выявляя их идеологическую основу в интерпретации коммуникативной ситуации.

Использование термина «вирус разума» в контексте речевых единиц продиктовано тем, что данные единицы приводят почти к такому же воздействию на объект, как и биологический или компьютерный вирус, т. е. приводят к психологическому расстройству, искажению действительности, информационному провалу, негативным эмоциям и т. д.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: терминология, вирус разума, поле эмерджентности, эмерджентные конструкции, эмерджентность, психологическое воздействие, коммуникативные ситуации, речевые единицы, когнитивная война, искусственный интеллект, концепты, манипулятивный эффект.

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INTRODUCTION

It is believed that the term “virus of mind” was first introduced by the British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, who in his research came to the conclusion that the concept of “virus,” as in the biological and computer versions, is quite applicable to the human mind in the process of understanding or interpreting certain information. R. Dawkins believes that for the spread or infection of the mind, two qualities of the “victim” are necessary. “These qualities are, firstly, a readiness to replicate information accurately, perhaps with some mistakes that are subsequently reproduced accurately; and, secondly, a readiness to obey instructions encoded in the information so replicated” [Richard Dawkins 1993].

Richard Dawkins in his work hypothesizes that everything accepted as truth on the basis of blind faith without empirical or any evidence or proof can be resulted as the result of a virus of the mind. As the main argument to prove his theory, Richard Dawkins refers to the postulates of religion, because religious dogmas are not amenable to empirical argumentation, but are based purely on faith. In this work, we will not refute the validity of the use of this term relating to religion, since there are very many questions to which it cannot be given scientifically proven answers, especially in the field of the functioning of human consciousness.

At the same time, we must recognize the relevance and absolute, in our opinion, validity of such a phenomenon, the nature and functioning of which can be designated by the term “virus of the mind” (the terms “mental virus” is also found). Accordingly, the term “virus of the mind” reflects objective reality, which is expressed in the form of a change in the mental state of an object as a result of emotional influence on a person, group of people, crowds of people through verbal, visual or other means of mental influence. In this context, the opinion of A. J. Galang seems relevant, who notes that

“the mental virus can be posited as a concept or cognitive structure that alters mental processing and becomes rapidly ubiquitous within a mind” [Adrienne John R Galang 2022].

In the context of the relevance of the concept of “virus of the mind” or mental virus, it is also necessary to note that researchers of this phenomenon often associate the functioning of this term precisely in the area of influence on the consciousness, mind of a person or a group of people. In particular, A.V. Mikulin considers it as a “socio-rational illusions”, the main distinguishing feature of which is “that they, being elements of the consciousness of an individual or programmatic parts of an organization’s strategy, are recognized at the rational level as productive, but in the end always lead to unexpected and most often negative results” [Makulin 2014].

Although, the consequences of mental influence may not always have only “negative” results. Mental influence basically has the goal of stimulating an action, i.e. behavioral activity. The mental influence that stimulates mass behavioral activity is most clearly observed in the political field. In particular, in the strategy of building a scheme for the influence of certain political parties on the electorate, which is often built on the basis of psychological influence and manipulation of consciousness [Baykhanov 2022: 20-29].

Viruses of the mind contribute to the programming of consciousness, which affects the behavior of a person or a crowds of people. Richard Brodie believes that “mind viruses issue instructions by programming us with new memes that affect our behavior” [Richard Brodie 1996].

An interesting interpretation of the concept of “virus of the mind” (mental virus) is found in the work of V. N. Kryuchkov, who proposes to consider the “mission of the company”, expressed in certain slogans or other text forms as a “mental virus”, since “Mission is the promise of the company to the client, formulated in

the language of emotions and in terms of the strength of the emotional impact equal to or exceeding the visible (calculable) profit of the company" [Kryuchkov 2009: 119–122].

It should be noted that in almost all works that touch on the problem of the virus of the mind to one degree or another, it is considered in the context of its influence on person or on a mass of people consciousness. Some analysts today perceive this problem as a threat to the existing culture of people's livelihoods. In particular, in this context it is presented by the American businessman Elon Musk, who sees in the so-called culture of "the woke mind virus" an "existential threat to humanity" [Brain Strain 2023].

We can't say that the problem of mental influence on a person or a group of people arose only in modern reality. The problem of mental influence on people appeared in the history of mankind with the emergence of community as such. However, the mental influence, and therefore the virus of the mind, received its development and formation as a philosophical direction in ancient Greece with the advent of the philosophical school of Sophistry.

The main postulate of Sophistry was conviction of truth, not proof of truth, but, since for sophists it is characteristic "not the content, which may be true, but the form of the grounds, through which one can both defend everything and attack everything" (Hegel, Works, vol. 1, p. 212). I. Kant emphasizes that sophistry is a doctrine through which "one tries to deliberately deceive others" [Kant I. 1915: 126-127].

FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM

The main goal posed in this work is to analyze the emergent potential of lexical or speech units that may be considered as the mental core of the term of "virus of the mind" in the context of the ever-increasing influence of the media on a person's mentality, on "his" interpretation of the worldview under the influence of powerful propaganda both, the state institutions and corporate resources that pursue the goal of drawing the human masses into the orbit of their political and/or corporate interests.

It should be noted that the concept of "a virus" in people's lives basically has negative semantics associated with health problems, as well as disruption of the full operation of electronic equipment and programs. For example, in Ozhegov's explanatory dictionary the concept of "virus" is defined as "the smallest non-cellular particle that multiplies in living cells, the causative agent of an infectious disease" [Ожегов 2020]. Accordingly, the effect achieved by means of a virus, be it biological, electronic or mental, can be interpreted as a negative result

aimed at changing or destroying the "normal" state of the object.

ANALYSIS ON THE FIELD OF EMERGENCE

To obtain a complete analysis of the concept of "mind virus," supposedly it is necessary first of all to determine the field of emergence (FE) of the functioning of this term [Альбеков, Жеребило 2015: 1797-1800]. We need this analysis in view of the fact that the term does not function so actively in the real information field. The analysis from the perspective of the field of emergence will provide us with a fairly complete picture regarding the directions and communicative situations in which this term can potentially be used. In the context of the above mentioned, it is important to note that in modern reality, it is political, religious or corporate organizations that are the most global sources to spread of the virus of the mind. It is in the offices of these organizations that information models, methods, techniques, forms that contain a mental virus for both individual and mass purposes of infecting people's consciousness are being developed.

As for the conception of "the field of emergence" is a semantically designated reality that is formed in the process of system formation after deterministic chaos has overcome the bifurcation point and the direction in which the vector of development of the situation is indicated on the base of which the variable potential of fuzzy models of the system can be prognosticated". [Альбеков 2020].

It is also necessary to clarify that on the basis of the field of emergence, it is not the semantic potential of a certain lexical unit that is analyzed, i.e. in the core of FE there is not a lexeme as a linguistic or speech unit, but the communicative situation itself, nominated by a specific lexeme or phrase.

In the process of modeling the concept *virus of the mind*, the deterministic chaos is the intention, the idea of forming a unit, that may cause a virus in mind of a certain person, group or organization. The model itself has not been developed, there is only an intention or an idea that has not yet acquired sufficiently clear configurations, plans, projects, discourse, means of transformation, etc. Accordingly, at this stage of the formation of a virus of the mind, there is only the intention of creating a unit that may cause a virus, which is a deterministic chaos as such.

Based on deterministic chaos, countless fuzzy models are prognosticated, which, using the modern potential of artificial intelligence, are easy to systematize according to the criteria of relevance based on the communicative situation.

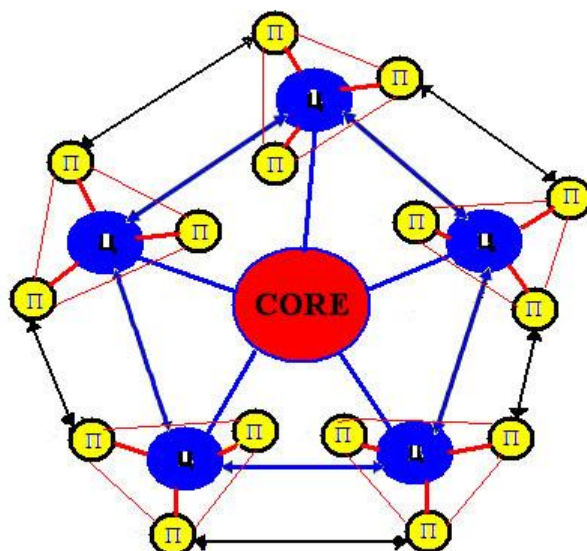


Figure № 1. Model of field of emergence

In the center of the FE (field of emergence) there is a tick, a slogan, a proverb, a phraseological unit, a catchphrase, a cultural concept, obscenities, a reference to a historical event, a reference to religious dogma, irony, etc. These verbal expressions carry the main semantic idea on the basis of which the speech model and its semantic orientations are built.

At the periphery of the FE there is a lexical material that contributes to the structural organization of the model. This is primarily vocabulary, style, case factors, extralinguistic factors (ethnic, religious, political, historical, geographical, cultural, physical, physiological, etc.), semiotics, kinetics, iconicity, visuality and many other factors [Альбеков 2016: 105-109]. In the periphery, a focus on a potential audience is also manifested, i.e. what social, ethnic, political and other segments of the population or personality the audience consists of.

RESEARCH METHODS

The main methods that were used in the research process are, first of all, the case method, the method of component analysis, and statistical analysis.

RESEARCH RESULTS

It should be noted that FE is a unified neural network between all structural elements of the field, which is a model of transformational movements of both semantic and structural units, where there are always transfers of peripheral units into the center of FE and back, thereby turning them into the ideological basis for interpreting a communicative situation.

One of the brilliant examples of such transformation and, accordingly, deliberate mental infection of the audience is the speech of the head of the European Commission Ursula von der

Leyen at the Atlantic Council Award ceremony for Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

«Many of your relatives lost their life when the atomic bomb raised Hiroshima to the ground. You've grown up with the stories of survivors, and you wanted us to listen to the same stories to face the past and to learn something about the future.

*It was a sobering start to G7 and one that will not forget especially, when Russia threatens to use nuclear weapons **once again**. It is heinous. It is dangerous.»* [Atlantic Council Award 2023].

Here we have an example of moving of a peripheral unit in the form of the lexeme **once again** to the center of the FE, since it is this unit that becomes the basis of the essential semantic load in the intent of the statement and the intention of the author.

A peripheral unit by itself cannot become a carrier of a virus of the mind if it has not moved to the center of the FE, where only units that possess ideological, semantic, and emotional attributes are located. The virus is carried within the idea, meaning, emotion itself, expressed in a word, sign or action. That is why it is important to correctly determine the position of a word or expression in the structure of FE.

In the above example, it is the lexeme **once again** that is the source of the virus of the mind, since any listener who does not have historical knowledge of who exactly used nuclear weapons against Japan will definitely have the conviction that it was Russia that committed this act. Taking into account such a fact that the vast majority of information resources hanging around the world belong to Western companies and that the majority of the world's population does not have historical knowledge, but are recipients of information from these resources,

it can be stated that the use of the lexeme in the context of speech **once again** will lead to the “correct” perception and interpretation by the listener, which corresponds to the author’s intention, pursuing the goal of infecting the audience with a virus of the mind.

Why do we define this and similar statements as a “virus of the mind”? Because the use of these units leads to an almost similar effect on the object as with a biological or computer virus, i.e., leading to psychological stress, distortion of reality, information failure, negative emotions, etc.

One of the interesting factors that developed during our research was that lexical units located on the periphery of the FE and transformed into the center of the FE, thereby acquiring the main semantic component of the utterance, consist for the most part not of the major parts of the sentence, but of the attribute and adverbial modifier, expressed mainly by adjectives, adverbs, participial phrases or introductory words. Of course, they are all closely related to the major parts of the sentence, but at the same time, it is these secondary parts that for the most part become the basic means of spreading the virus of the mind.

However, when we talk about the virus of the mind, it is necessary to take into account that the virus as such is not carried by specific words, but by the main ideological message, which, with the help of verbal means of the nominative or predicative function, is formulated in such a way that it infects the consciousness of the maximum number of people. At the same time, it is the peripheral units that give this nomination or predication an emotional connotation that enhance the psychological effect on human consciousness. If we return to the example of Mrs. Ursula’s, von der Leyen speech without using the adverb “**once again**,” then the emotional component of this message will not be that much effective even in the context of such a communicative situation.

In the context of FE, it is interesting to analyze the use of distinct lexical units by the human mind depending on the communicative situation. Following some linguists who believe that the basis of a statement is a primary thought or planed, which only then turns into a system of words that materializes in a specific form, we also adhere to the opinion that when choosing appropriate speech units a person’s consciousness operates with semantic units [Luria 1998, Whorf 1960, Chomsky 1986]. This means that the lexical material from which the text is constructed is exclusively selected in accordance with the communicative situation and the manipulative intention of the author. In this competence, the human brain is incomparably superior to artificial intelligence.

An example of this dominance is demonstrated in Daniel Bates and Matt Strudwick’s Mail Online review of Vladimir Putin’s interview with Tucker Carlson. In one of their emotional assessments, the authors state, «*The despot made the **jaw-dropping** accusations during the much anticipated two-hour long sit-down interview with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson*». [Daniel Bates and Matt Strudwick. 2024].

For example, in the English version, the key unit with the help of which emotional intensity is achieved is the lexeme **jaw-dropping**, used as an attribute of the object **accusations**. It is this attribute that gives meaning to the absolute groundlessness and absurdity of the accusations being made, since the expression **jaw-dropping** is possible only with the monstrous absurdity of any statement. What is also important here is the set of semantic relationships between units of nominative, predicative, deterministic, and applicative functions. For example, in the given example, the manipulative effect of the lexeme **jaw-dropping** is enhanced in the context of the use of the lexeme the *despot*, thereby strengthening the **belief** (which, according to Dawkins, is one of the indicators of the virus of the mind, i.e. faith) of the unacceptability of any statements from the “despot” for their absurdity.

If we translate this passage into Russian using a computer translator or the chatgpt neural network, we get the following text.

Google translator. «Деспот выдвинул **потрясающие обвинения** во время долгожданного двухчасового интервью с бывшим ведущим Fox News Такером Карлсоном».

When translating the resulted variant, i.e. from Russian into English, we get “stunning accusations” instead of **jaw-dropping accusations**.

Yandex translator. «Деспот выступил с **ошеломляющими обвинениями** во время долгожданного двухчасового интервью с бывшим ведущим Fox News Такером Карлсоном». Translation into English — «Staggering accusations».

Нейросеть Neural network ask.chadgpt.ru. Деспот выдвинул **потрясающие обвинения** во время долгожданного двухчасового интервью с бывшим ведущим Fox News Такером Карлсоном.

The analysis we carried out using the FE model found that in almost 90% of texts that express surprise or dismay, the following lexemes are used: amazing, surprising, startling, stunning, shocking, astonishing. It is these lexemes that are included in the center of the FE. The lexeme **jaw-dropping** is present in the periphery in conjunction with the lexemes given in the table.

Table No. 1. Peripheral lexemes in the FE model

1. remarkable	27. rare	53. incredible
2. impressive	28. inconceivable	54. jolting
3. stupendous	29. upsetting	55. jaw-dropping
4. eye-opening	30. incomprehensible	56. stupefying
5. marvelous	31. unthinkable	57. breathtaking
6. wondrous	32. dismaying	58. jarring
7. staggering	33. noticeable	59. awesome
8. unbelievable	34. confounding	60. flabbergasting
9. phenomenal	35. disconcerting	61. miraculous
10. blindsiding	36. striking	62. dumfounding
11. uncommon	37. portentous	63. dumbfounding
12. fabulous	38. notable	64. marvellous
13. outstanding	39. unique	65. unusual
14. sublime	40. unannounced	66. rocking
15. unanticipated	41. bewildering	67. surprizing
16. unforeseen	42. nonplusing	68. bowling over
17. sensational	43. heart-stopping	69. taking aback
18. unlikely	44. conspicuous	70. flooring
19. confusing	45. befuddling	71. dazing
20. prodigious	46. discomfiting	72. shaking up
21. unimaginable	47. unwonted	73. knocking for a loop
22. perplexing	48. nonplussing	
23. muddling	49. awful	
24. singular	50. spectacular	
25. flustering	51. unexpected	
26. extraordinary	52. astounding	

In our research, we have often turned to AI to analyze its manipulative potential. One of the most interesting results of the work of artificial intelligence (AI) is that absolutely all translators, as well as the neural network, chose a lexeme that is included in the center of the FE, i.e. one of the given lexemes — **amazing, surprising, startling, stunning, shocking, astonishing**. In principle, this result was quite expected, since the AI selects the most “popular” option from the entire huge arsenal of proposals. At the same time, the choice of AI, although it is the most popular of all variable forms of speech units, however, in its emotional richness cannot be compared with the version of the author of the publication, i.e. with **jaw-dropping** accusations. This proves that the human brain, human consciousness in terms of emotional impact on a person or on masses of people, is absolutely superior to AI in its manipulative potential, at least for today. Moreover, in the efficiency of choosing a speech unit in a corresponding communicative situation, the human brain far exceeds the potential of AI in the aspect of using of manipulating speech units, i.e. the human brain, consciousness chooses the best of the options to express the intentions here and now.

However, in this work we aim to explore the manipulative potential of the human mind, expressed in the form of textual form, purely as an

object or as a resource with the help of which a virus of the mind is produced, since AI will not be so effective in generating a virus, at least at this period. The main reason why AI can't be as efficient is because AI operates on facts. For example, AI is unlikely to create a speech unit in which the idea of the fact of Russia's use of nuclear weapons will be traced due to the absence in its RAM information regarding Russia's use of nuclear weapons, although it has incomparably larger amount of vocabulary and information than the brain of even the most brilliant person.

Accordingly, a speech unit, which by its wording can be interpreted by the addressee in accordance with the intention of the author and has an impact on the consciousness of a person or a mass of people, regardless of the truthfulness or falsity of the information, carries within itself elements of a virus of mind.

Of course, all these verbal techniques are significant resources of the so-called cognitive war, the ultimate goal of which, according to A.N. Medushinsky is “to overcome the internal information and propaganda barriers of the state, change the value system and understanding of the world, force the population to make a desired decision, establish “reflexive control” over it, undermining its ability to “ob-

serve, navigate, decide and act.” [Medushevsky 2023: 92—107].

Another example of cognitive impact in modern Western print media is the underlining the certain lexemes in speech units, thereby distinguishing them from the rest in the flow of information. This is a relatively new technique and it should be noted that when using this technique, not only keywords are underlined. For example, Philip Pilkington uses this technique in his article “Higher defense spending won’t save Europe.”

«Against the backdrop of the collapse of Ukrainian defensive lines in Avdiivka last week and presidential frontrunner Donald Trump saying that he would not defend Europe in the face of a Russian attack, calls for increased military expenditure in Europe grow ever louder. These calls appear to be emerging from the defense ministries of various countries». [Pilkington 2024].

The presence of non-key lexemes in the list of underlined words is also a method of cognitive influence, since if only key words are underlined, this can activate an internal defensive reaction of consciousness. However, if we look at the list of words from the above passage (collapse, saying, calls, emerging), we will see that all of them, to one degree or another, belong to the so-called propaganda vocabulary and have an emotional meaning potential, taking into account their location in the sentence structure and what words they correlate with.

One of the main results or symptoms of the mind virus is the lack of analytical, logical thinking in the infected audience, i.e., information provided by authoritative means or agencies is perceived at the level of blind faith. Accordingly, any information that contradicts this dogma is perceived as hostile and dangerous for the world order of this “correct” society. Evidence of such perception or a symptom of a virus of the mind as a result of cognitive warfare is the revelation of one of the Polish journalists, Eugene Zinkiewicz.

«Olśnienie

Czytając pewną „perłkę”, pod moim feletonem Dla tych, którzy żywią i bronią... komentarz wyrażony przez poirytowanego czytelnika, z uwagi na niezrozumienie prostego, krótkiego tekstu, doznałem iluminacji! Olśnienia, iż rzeczywiście statystyka poziomu zrozumienia nawet tak banalnego przekazu syntetycznych informacji, jakim jest prozaiczny rozkład jazdy, jest prawdziwa!» [Zinkiewicz 2024].

“Revelation

While reading a certain “gem” under my column “For those who feed and defend” a comment expressed by an irritated reader due to the misunderstanding of a simple, short text, I experienced revelation! Enlightenment that the

statistics on the level of understanding of even such a trivial transfer of synthetic information as a prosaic timetable are actually true!”

This “Revelation” can be considered as one of the evidences of a virus of the mind, since the author identified the problem of society’s lack of ability to analyze “even such basic information.” In this context it is actual what S.G. Kara-Murza believes that it is the biased information policy of the media that is the main reason for the lack of skills in critical analysis of information among the masses of people. He notes that “the man of the masses, the product of a mosaic culture, was largely created by the press” and that “the replacement of words and concepts with political euphemisms as a whole technology leads to a serious disease of society.” [Kara-Murza 2005: 287, 288].

CONCLUSION

The virus of the mind is an integral part of the so-called “cognitive war,” which today has become especially relevant in the light of global changes in the interpretation of the rules of civilization and culture. New terms appear in the information field, reflecting the symptoms of an increasingly intensifying virus of the mind in the human consciousness. One such innovation is the term “biodron”, which indicates an absolutely infected sick consciousness. Accordingly, the attributes of the concept “virus of the mind” must be considered not only the mass transmission of memes from person to person, but also, first of all, information pressure leading to a personal and/or mass change in the psychological state, which suppresses the logical thinking of an individual.

Analysis of the concept of “virus of the mind”, carried out on the basis of the field of emergence, allows us to identify the emergent potential of speech, visual, semiotic and other units that perform the main functional and semantic role in the formation and spread of the virus.

Identification of the emergent potential of the concept of “virus of the mind” can contribute to the development of mechanisms for neutralizing the psychological effect and consequences of mental influence on a person or crowds of people.

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