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THE PECULIARITIES OF MODELING THE REALITY BY LEXICAL UNITS ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE REPRESENTATION OF RATING RUBRIC «WORD OF THE YEAR» OF ENGLISH DICTIONARIES

This paper investigates the peculiarities of modeling objective reality through lexical units, specifically examining the «Word of the Year» (WOTY) rubrics of major authoritative English dictionaries (Oxford English Dictionary (OED), Merriam-Webster, Collins English Dictionary, Cambridge Dictionary). The study argues that the WOTY selection process is a form of modeling and reflecting the contemporary reality, where specific lexical items are elevated to represent complex societal shifts. The modeling mechanisms of the «Word of the Year» rubric function as a micro-model of human reality, which operates through specific processes: the mechanism of onomasiological selection (the process of choosing a name (word) for a specific object or concept); the mechanism of semantic condensation (the ability of a word to compress a large volume of meanings, associations, and cultural contexts within itself); and the discursive-evaluative mechanism (a way of presenting information that not only describes a fact but also imposes a certain evaluation on it through context).

By analyzing the WOTY selections from recent years (2022–2025), the research identifies four key realities – such as: the crisis reality, the technological reality, the psychological and social reality, the synthetic reality – that dominate the contemporary linguistic worldview. Using 2025 as a focal point, the study analyzes the shift from descriptive lexical units to strategic, intent-based ones. The current lexical trend reflects a shift toward a digital system of manipulation defined by engineered provocation and autonomous AI-generated content. The findings suggest that modern lexicography has transcended simple documentation, acting instead as an interpretative lens that structures and categorizes the chaotic reality of the post-digital age.

Keywords: classical structuralism, modern cognitive and sociolinguistic frameworks, linguistic modeling the reality, media, lexicography, Word of the Year, lexical units (innovations).

Чумак Людмила. Особливості моделювання реальності за допомогою лексичних одиниць на прикладі відображення рейтингової рубрики «Слово року» в англійських словниках.

У статті розглянуто особливості моделювання об'єктивної реальності лексичними одиницями на прикладі репрезентації рейтингової рубрики «Слово року» (WOTY) основних авторитетних англійських словників (Oxford English Dictionary (OED), Merriam-Webster, Collins English Dictionary, Cambridge Dictionary). Процес відбору «Слова року» є формою моделювання та відображення сучасної реальності, де певні лексичні одиниці наділяються особливого значення, що уособлюють складні суспільні зміни. Механізми моделювання рубрики «Слово року» функціонують як мікро-модель людської реальності, що діє через специфічні процеси: механізм онемасіологічного відбору (процес вибору назви (слова) для певного об'єкта чи поняття); механізм семантичної конденсації (здатність слова згущувати / ущільнювати великий обсяг значень, асоціацій та культурних контекстів); та дискурсивно-оцінний механізм (спосіб подачі інформації, який не лише описує факт, а й нав'язує йому певну оцінку через контекст).

Шляхом аналізу слів року (WOTY), обраних за останні роки (2022–2025), дослідження ідентифікує чотири ключові «реальності», що домінують у сучасній лінгвістичній картині світу: кризову реальність, технологічну реальність, психологічну та соціальну реальність, а також синтетичну реальність. Використовуючи 2025 рік як фокусну точку, у дослідженні аналізується перехід від дескриптивних (описових) лексичних одиниць до стратегічних, інтенційних (базованих на намірі). Сучасний лексичний тренд відображає зсув у бік цифрової системи маніпуляцій, визначеної спроектованою провокацією та автономним контентом, створеним штучним інтелектом. Результати дослідження свідчать про те, що сучасна лексикографія вийшла за межі простого документування, виступаючи натомість інтерпретаційною лінзою, яка структурує та категоризує хаотичну реальність епохи постцифровізації.

Ключові слова: класичний структуралізм, сучасні когнітивні та соціолінгвістичні парадигми, лінгвістичне моделювання реальності, медіа, лексикографія, «Слово року», лексичні одиниці (інновації).

Introduction. The language is not simply a static repository of denotations or just passively reflects the world of reality. It is a dynamic and an adaptive system that actively models and constructs individual as well as social perception. The lexical system reflects all the changes of the society's existence. So, the reality shapes the language, and similarly the language frames the human's understanding of the reality. In this context, the lexical unit becomes the primary instrument for modeling the lexical innovations summing up the main points of complex social, political, technological changes by well-defined linguistic symbols.

Analysis of previous research. The study of how language reflects and shapes human perception of reality has long been a focal point of linguistic inquiry. This research builds upon several established academic traditions, ranging from classical structuralism to modern cognitive and sociolinguistic frameworks. The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (Ottenheimer, 2009) provides the philosophical bedrock for this study, suggesting that the structure of a language affects its speakers' worldviews or cognition. Modern interpretations by G. Lakoff and

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M. Johnson regarding conceptual metaphors also contribute to our understanding of how lexical units serve as «building blocks» for the mental construction of reality (Lakoff, 1999). In recent decades, a specific lexicographical practice has appeared that selects this modeling function. The phenomenon of «Word of the Year» has recently transitioned from a marketing tool for dictionary publishers into a serious subject of linguistic analysis. Every year, world famous dictionaries publish words of the year – the most popular words in the last 12 months. A. Metcalf pioneered the study of «new words» and their success, establishing the «FUDGE» factors (Frequency, Unobtrusiveness, Diversity of users, Generation of forms, and Endurance) to predict which words will integrate into the linguistic model of reality (Metcalf, 2002). C. L. Barnhart and D. K. Barnhart have extensively documented the evolution of neologisms, providing a basis for understanding how dictionaries capture shifts in social consciousness (Barnhart, 1989; Barnhart, 1982; Barnhart, 1993; Barnhart, 2007; Barnhart, 1989; Barnhart, 1991; Barnhart, 1985; 13 Barnhart, 2000). The recent studies by scholars J. Milroy and R. Wardhaugh (Milroy, 2003; Wardhaugh, 2005) highlight that WOTY selections are not just isolated words but are lexical condensates of the year's most significant cultural and political narratives. In the previous years, the popularity of words was influenced by the pandemic and vaccination, the Russian-Ukrainian war, and some other concepts that are central to our current model of reality.

The notion *word(s) of the year*, found in numerous lexicographic issues that is also shortened to *WOTY* (or *WotY*), relates to any of different kinds purposefully arranged ratings concerning the most noteworthy word(s) or expression(s), used by individuals in a particular sphere of social life during an exact year. Different organizations, societies, centres, including the American Dialect Society (since 1990), dictionary-publishing company Merriam-Webster (since 2003), Oxford English Dictionary (since 2004), Dictionary.com (since 2010), Collins English Dictionary (since 2013), Cambridge Dictionary (since 2015), as well as their members: linguists, lexicographers and consultants, etymologists, grammarians, scholars, researchers, editors, writers, journalists (for example, an English lexicographer Susie Dent since 2004; an American lexicographer Grant Barrett since 2004) select and announce Words of the Year in the number of categories. The nominations number the categories like: most useful, most creative, most unnecessary, most outrageous, most euphemistic and others.

However, the mechanism by which these specific lexical units model reality is the reason for doing deeper investigation.

The aim of the article. The current study aimed to analyse the tendencies of modeling reality represented by the most popular and the most important lexical units in the public sphere. In linguistics, a «model» is a simplified representation of a complex system. When a dictionary publisher selects a «Word of the Year» (WOTY), they are not just picking a popular term; they are constructing a lexical model of a specific historical moment. This process operates through several mechanisms: by examining the word-form structure, semantic, etymological, and sociolinguistic characteristics of selected words from recent years – this study demonstrates how the «Word of the Year» rubric as a lexicographic phenomenon acts, organizing chaotic global events into a structured linguistic narrative.

To achieve this aim, the following **objectives** have been set:

1. To define the theoretical framework of language as a secondary modeling system in the context of modern lexicography.
2. To investigate the criteria for selection used by major English dictionaries (Oxford English Dictionary (OED), Merriam-Webster, Collins English Dictionary, Cambridge Dictionary) and how these criteria prioritize different fragments of reality.
3. To categorize WOTY selections from the last four years (2022–2025) into thematic clusters (e. g., technological, socio-political, environmental).
4. To reveal the semantic shifts in established words that have been repurposed to model new aspects of reality (e.g., the new meanings of *gaslighting*).
5. To determine the role of digital discourse (hashtags, social media frequency) in accelerating the modeling process of the English lexicon.

Word of the Year in this paper is understood in its broader definition introduced by F. Katamba as «the word-form» – «the physical form which realizes or represents a word in speech or writing» (Katamba, 2005, p. 11). In Lexicology there exists a clear-cut distinction definition between a word as a word-form (the phonological or orthographic sound or appearance of a word that can be used to describe or identify something [The Free Dictionary]) and a word known as a lexical unit, lexical item or a lexeme (an abstract entity with different variants that is found in dictionaries and that has a particular meaning (Crystal, 1995, p. 118). The words or phrases under analysis are not absolutely brand-new forms from the point of view of their structure or their senses, but they have become newly prominent or notable in the particular year, and thus, have been updated to the dictionaries.

This research used a descriptive qualitative method with content analysis, based on quantitative description of the lexical units that are used to organize the communicative messages in the media (Drisko, 2016). The data were analyzed applying the theory of word formation process in English by M. Aronoff (Aronoff, 1980), L. Bauer (Bauer, 1983), H. Marchand (Marchand, 1969), I. Plag (Plag, 2002), Yu. Zatsnyi (Зацний, 2016).

Sources of data are taken from Modern English-language media (The Guardian, The Washington Post, The Times, The Telegraph, USA Today, the Wall Street Journal, BBC, ITV and some others) and major English-Language dictionaries (Oxford English Dictionary (OED), Merriam-Webster, Collins English Dictionary, Cambridge Dictionary), Dictionary.com), a learned society (The American Dialect Society (ADS)).

The findings revealed that lexicographers filter vast linguistic data to select a lexical unit that is not just in the category of the most frequently used words of the year, but the word with the most significant spike in usage or cultural weight, thus fixing a specific version of reality in the collective memory. Functional features of a word are associated with systemic relations of lexical units (Ищенко, 2010).

Lexical units, at once both a means of realization of goal intentions that refer to knowledge structures of individuals cognition and transforming realities of life and an instrument in their service (Сосюр, 1998, с. 27), are used in the process of constructing successful communication. Words form a sign system that is continuously developing and changing with an individual – its creator and native speaker.

These processes of constructing successful communication can be both goal-oriented and those that arise implicitly. At the same time, these processes occur throughout social activity of an individual who does not only strive to recognize and change the world, but is also involved in different changes during some life period. These changes can be an objective result of the individual activity. At the same time the linguists (e.g., B. Comrie (Comrie, 1981)) claim the complex character of the factors leading to lingual innovational changes, provoked by an individual consciously. The result of purposeful efforts to create new lexical units that reflect individual's intentions correlates with the significance of the appropriate referents they represent.

Results. In the ongoing research on understanding the dynamic nature of the linguistic modeling the reality, the comparative analysis of the current nominative field (2024/2025) with the lexicographic marking of the recent past (2022) was given. Based on the announcements up to December 2025, the dataset of the winning words from the major English dictionaries were established (see Table 1).

Table 1

Dictionary	2022	2023	2024	2025
Oxford	goblin mode	rizz	brain rot	rage bait
Merriam-Webster	gaslighting	authentic	polarization	slop
Collins	permacrisis	AI	brat	vibe coding
Cambridge	homer	hallucinate	manifest	parasocial

Analysis of reality modeling (case studies): representation of reality in the 2022–2025 lexicographic cycle

This analysis reveals a trajectory from external crisis and passivity (the «Post-Pandemic Shock» of 2022) to internal decay and performative agency (the «Digital Saturation» of 2025).

From a linguistic perspective, these lexical units do not just describe trends; they model specific spheres of modern existence. They are grouped into four distinct «realities»:

2022 – modeling the «Crisis Reality» (the era of instability): these words model a reality defined by external threats and thus focused on internal states and crisis (*goblin mode, gaslighting, permacrisis*). People were tired and the world was unstable.

2023 – modeling the «Technological Reality» (the digital shift): these units model a reality where the line between physical and virtual is dissolving, so they are focused on truth and technology (*AI, authentic, hallucinate*). People were trying to distinguish real from fake.

2024 – modeling the «Psychological and Social Reality» (the internal state): the words of this category were focused on mental health, identity, presentation, social dynamics (*brat, demure, brain rot*). People retreated into subcultures and specific aesthetics.

2025 – modeling the «Synthetic Reality» (the degradation of information): the words here mark a shift from excitement about technology to cynicism about its output (*slop, rage bait*). The vocabulary has become more critical, describing a reality that is actively hostile to human quality and connection.

To understand the dynamic nature of the linguistic modeling the reality, it is necessary to contrast the current nominative field with lexicographic marking of the recent past. This analysis reveals two distinct evolutionary turns.

1. The psychological turn: from passive crisis (2022) to active performance (2025). A comparison with the 2022 cycle highlights a shift from external shock to internal coping:

- The threat: *permacrisis* (2022) modeled an external, global threat; *brain rot* (2025) modeled an internal, cognitive threat. The focus of vulnerability has moved from the environment to the organism.
- The truth: *gaslighting* (2022) modeled a fear of being deceived (victimhood); *slop* (2025) modeled a fear first of psychological manipulation, and later of the mass production of low-quality content. The focus is on the material (usually AI) that causes the rot.

- The behavior: *goblin mode* (2022) modeled private withdrawal; *rage bait* (2025) modeled a reality that is strategic/manipulative. The focus is on the tactic used to keep users engaged in the cycle.

2. The technological turn: from innovation (2023) to degeneration (2024). In 2023, the dominant model focused on the arrival of tools (*AI, hallucinate*), in 2024, the model shifts to the biological consequence *brain rot* (2024). The dictionary no longer represents technology as a neutral innovation but as a degenerative force. The reality is no longer defined by what the machine can do, but by what the machine is doing to individuals (cognitive decay).

Analysis of Lexicographical Approaches (2022–2025). It was reported by the press service of the University of Oxford that the lexeme *goblin mode* was declared the 2022 WOTY. For the first time until then OED chose it by online voting, receiving the highest vote total with 93 % (318,956 votes) while the two other contenders in this selection were far less sought-after (*metaverse* and *#IStandWith* with 14,484 and 8,693 votes accordingly) (Oxford, 2022). *Goblin mode* looks more like a phrase rather than a word, built on the principle of the simplest and most general word-formation process, attaching two existing words and known in Linguistics as compounding. It is used to represent a certain state of being or mind.

The Oxford lexicographers stated that the analysed lexical unit first appeared in social media (on Twitter) in 2009. But it has risen in popularity after several tweets and posts of the American celebrities (e.g., actress Julia Fox; business magnate Elon Musk, etc.), pretending to have used this lexeme. Within some months of the year 2022 it became viral on different online platforms often as part of memes or posts depicting unflattering and indulgent behavior – a response to such trends as cottagecore (an Internet-based lifestyle idealizing rural living) or self-improvement (Slobbing, 2022; What, 2022; Musk’s, 2022). So, according to scholars and academic researchers the official definition of *goblin mode* is the following: «a type of behaviour which is unapologetically self-indulgent, lazy, slovenly, or greedy, typically in a way that rejects social norms or expectations» (‘Goblin mode’, 2022).

An important reason why this lexical unit has entered the English language is social tendency of returning to more aspects of pre-pandemic life over the past two years of COVID lockdown restrictions (‘Goblin mode’, 2022). Hence, the following example from the media explains the situation as what was happening to the world around during the year:

Although many people tweeting about goblin mode have characterized it as an almost spiritual-level embrace of our most debased tendencies, Marnell says there is «healthy goblin mode and destructive goblin mode» (Slobbing, 2022);

«Going goblin» basically means showing your most authentic self. People today are sick of overly curated images and perfect bodies. Social media content that shows relatable, eccentric, and unexpected lifestyles is more interesting now. So, people love the concept of the goblin as a meme (What, 2022).

So, the analyzed word represented the post-COVID reality when people demonstrated their unwillingness to go back to their old way of life. This modeled a reality of private withdrawal. Generally, this was combined with the desire to stay home, be messy and a rejection of social norms or expectations which demonstrated an introverted, anti-social survival mechanism.

The lexical unit *permacrisis* and its plural form *permacrises* was chosen as the Collins Dictionary’s 2022 WOTY. It was one of six words on the list selected from the Collins Corpus database of words that contained a vast range of written and spoken media with social media sources and books published around the world. According to theory of word-formation process the analysed word is created by merging the initial part of the word with the source lexical unit (*perma-* + *crisis*), known as blending (Bauer, 2013).

Though the noun *permacrisis* was declared by Collins Dictionary Word of the Year in «truly awful» 2022, it has been observed in academic contexts and mass media since the 1970s (‘Permacrisis’, 2022). This word is clearly and easily recognized and understood as it’s handy for any particularly uncompromising situation.

The reasons for this «ongoing state of uncertainty and worry» (Permacrisis, 2022), according to one Collins editors, are: conflicts, climate crises, the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, inflation when people feel they’re «lurching from one crisis to another without really drawing breath» (‘Permacrisis’ is, 2022). In total the following explanations of the word *permacrisis* resumes the awfulness of a long and permanent period of crisis, as a result of different factors coming together or following in sequence:

The 2020s have certainly seen their fair share of upheaval – and we’re only two years in! Already this decade we’ve had to contend with a pandemic and its aftermath, a brutal new war in Europe, and in the UK

an economic crisis that saw the Bank of England warning of a «material risk to financial stability». We've also had three prime ministers – so far. How fitting, then, that 2022's Word of the Year is permacrisis, a term that perfectly embodies the dizzying sense of lurching from one unprecedented event to another, as we wonder bleakly what new horrors might be around the corner (Collins).

To be clear, it was never going to be easy. The Year of the Rabbit began in Britain much as the last one ended – with waves of strike action, reports of alarming ambulance wait times and a jittery pound. The IMF says the UK will have the slowest growth among industrialized nations and Brexit costs are becoming harder to ignore. Meanwhile, a war in Europe rages and China's Covid resurgence raises the prospect of dangerous new mutations. Permacrisis indeed (Rishi Sunak, 2023).

The concept of *permacrisis* refers to situations that can only be observed, and not resolved. And the situation with the decision of former UK prime minister Liz Truss to settle the crisis in economy of the country since 2016 – the period of Brexit and Covid-19 pandemic only increased a far worse crises – in politics. And thus, after the triumph of Boris Johnson's premiership and then his demise, Liz Truss was the shortest-serving UK leader working only 45 days in office: *Liz Truss's brief tenure as prime minister helped contribute to the rise of «permacrisis» ... (Vibe, 2022).*

The war in Ukraine and its ongoing crisis had a deep impact on people and their activity. The technique of comparison in the process of explanation of such phenomena of reality as *permacrisis* states the defining and distinguishing features of similar or analogous events that happened not so long ago. This technique of comparison turns out to be a designation of *permacrisis* as it is given in the following media passage: *And is the Ukraine invasion really so unprecedented? We've had the Iraq war, unquestionably an invasion, whatever view one takes of its justification; the Balkan wars of the early 1990s which killed 100,000 people, displaced two million, and brought back concentration camps, mass executions and genocide; or the 1998/9 Kosovo war which nearly brought Nato and Russia into direct confrontation: have we all forgotten General Mike Jackson's refusal «to start the Third World War» at Pristina airport? (The real, 2022).*

So, the analysed WOTY of 2022 *permacrisis* represented the new reality of society that people could cope with and thus, the crisis became no longer a problem but a stubborn fact (*Permacrisis: what it means, 2022*) like the one the individuals adapted to: *The Ukraine invasion is no more justifiable because other evil things have happened in Europe before. Rather, it is to suggest that permacrisis is not something new, but a permanent part of the human condition (Trump, 2025).*

The online dictionary chose *gaslighting* as Merriam-Webster's WOTY 2022, which it defined as «the act or practice of grossly misleading someone especially for one's own advantage» (Merriam-Webster). This selection modeled a reality of epistemic victimhood.

The word-formation structure of lexical unit *gaslighting* is represented by combination of two morphological processes: word-composition of a morphological base (of two root words *gas* + *light*) and affixation (suffix *-ing*) attached to it (Manova, 2015). The editors of Merriam-Webster dictionary noted that in 2022 *gaslighting* was in the top 50 most searched-for words every day, so that it increased its popularity in search with a 1,740 % (Believe it, 2022).

At the same time, they highlight that *gaslighting* isn't a relatively recent word accepted into mainstream language. Its first media appearance refers to the title of a play in 1938, and the movies based on the play screened some years later. The first stated use of the analyzed lexeme dates to 1961 (Merriam-Webster). In the current century *gaslighting* is widely used by the media and in medical systems (psychiatry and psychology), in politics, in popular culture, entertainment for misinformation and disinformation commonly known as «fake news» and «deepfakes». During the last few years, particularly known as the «age of misinformation», different forms of deception and manipulation between representatives of social spheres and public life of modern society have promoted the development of its semantic representation.

The lexicographers noted that the analyzed lexeme was one of the most popular words of 2022 thanks to politicians who were especially good at manipulative and deceitful behavior. The speaker perceived reality as being manipulated by external forces (politicians, media, abusers):

The term has been everywhere since Donald Trump's inauguration, so much so that the Oxford Dictionaries named it one of the most popular words of 2018: gaslighting (I've counseled, 2018);

Some political leaders feed the people with fake news or wrong information and try to convince them it is true. They constantly tell lies to deceive and manipulate the people. They even shrug off criminal charges or criticisms as fake news or political persecution. Naive people then come to believe these lies (Beware!, 2023).

At present, this word refers to the tactics and tricks used to make an individual seem uncertain about the reality, personal experience, feelings, believes. The list of tactics used by modern gaslighters includes different forms of manipulation and abuse like: propaganda, contradictions, confusion, skepticism and even basic lying about the validity of previously unquestionable truths which are then replaced with false narratives (The rapid

rise, 2022). The lexeme *gaslighting* is found in the context of the role of media in sense of speaking power to truth: ... *I see the author is critical of Fox News and «right-wing» radio personalities, yet he doesn't include, nor mention: CNN, MSNBC, ABC, CBS, New York Times, Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, Washington Post, etc, etc. ... when mentioning how the media «gaslights» the American public. This is when I immediately knew this author could not be trusted to give a fair and unbiased critique of the media as a whole. Gaslighting, Psychological Warfare and Mental Manipulation, is a problem with «the media», as a whole, not just one side of the media... and the author's comments about the media – if honest – should've expressed that FACT* (Bryant, p. 2008).

One more example of applying *gaslighting* is the context of emotional abuse in intimate relationships or among family members was published in one of the top newspapers in the United States: *Gaslighting doesn't just happen in relation to big events or issues, it can occur over little things as a way to plant self-doubt and shift the power dynamic* (How to know, 2025).

In recent years the word *gaslighting* is displayed in the media messages to represent specific relationships among professional people aimed at to cause deceitfulness as the form of physical or social harm: *In the workplace, this could be having a colleague or boss who repeatedly puts you down in a non-constructive way, or tries to isolate you. For example, not inviting you to team socials because «you wouldn't want to come anyway» or refusing to acknowledge any of your successes. While some of these incidents might just seem like an unfortunate part of office politics, if they happen repeatedly, Bose says that it could be a sign of gaslighting.* (Gaslighting, 2019).

Tracing the diachronic progression of representation of reality in lexicographic cycle and media from 2022 to 2025, a distinct semantic drift was observed. The earlier period (2022–2023) focused on external crisis and passivity (*goblin mode, permacrisis, gaslighting*), modeling a subject trying to find basis in an unstable world. The later period (2024–2025) shifts toward internal decay, manipulation and performative agency (*slop, rage bait, brain rot*). The comparative analysis demonstrates that the selected lexical units do not merely denote new phenomena but rather represent the chaotic extralinguistic reality. The dictionary no longer prioritizes the state of the world but the state of the mind under the pressure of the digital environment.

For example, a lexical unit *slop* (in WOTY rubric of Merriam-Webster 2025) represents a semantic narrowing, moving from excitement about technology to cynicism about its output. Though major dictionaries like Merriam-Webster, Oxford, and Cambridge have in their entries the specific nuances of the word *slop* (e.g.: Merriam-Webster emphasizes on the quality and intent, defining it as «low-quality content generated by artificial intelligence and distributed online, especially that which is unhelpful, error-prone, or mass-produced» (Merriam-Webster); Oxford English Dictionary (OED) focuses on the volume and distribution, noting it as «material produced in high volume and distributed indiscriminately, typically viewed as inferior or intrusive» (Oxford); Cambridge Dictionary highlights the utility and impact, describing it as «material produced by AI that is of poor quality or has little value, often clogging search results or social media feeds» (Cambridge)), they also have agreed on its general meaning, describing the reality modeled as the pollution of our information ecosystem because of the influx of material on social media, in politics, in advertising, in generic LinkedIn advice, in event listing, in AI-generated books, in bizarre «spaghetti Jesus» images, in video games, in film and television, in music, in science and business: *Slop can now be found anywhere, from unsettling images on Facebook of Jesus fused with prawns to poorly written Kindle books ...* (LinkedIn, 2025). And it means that the only reality is volume; it exists because it is free to produce, not because it has something to say.

In 2025 media, *brain rot* (Oxford, 2024), as a perfect example of linguistic modeling the reality through lexical units, is frequently paired with *slop* describing an abstract feeling of mental fatigue caused by technology where AI generates nonsensical mass-produced content that is consumed passively. Oxford Languages officially crowned *brain rot* as the WOTY because it captured the prevailing mood of 2024 and 2025. In media context *brain rot* content is associated with clogged social feeds, making focused thinking more difficult. Thus, the lexical unit *brain rot* models a reality of exhaustion as a society has not only normalized the crisis, but also internalized the damage of the perceptive abilities of the individual. Technology is no longer viewed as a neutral tool but as a degenerative force affecting both the human mind and the digital infrastructure. So, in the example «*We have moved past the era of 'doomscrolling' and entered the era of brain rot, where the content is no longer even meant to be understood, only to be consumed as a visual hum*» (Are we living, 2025), *brain rot* is used to describe the psychological effects of infinite scrolling like gambling, leading to compulsive use and potential mental health issues.

It was noted that on the leading video platforms (namely TikTok and YouTube Shorts), and gaming (like Minecraft), *brain rot* has become a self-aware genre of entertainment and has been associated with the tendency for young people to use in their everyday speech the words that came and spread rapidly from the digital media, for example, *skibidi* (referencing *Skibidi Toilet* – a viral Internet meme). Media critics at Vox

recently analyzed the *Skibidi Toilet* phenomenon and its 2025 derivatives as the «first true brain rot blockbusters» (What kids, 2025) characterized by sensory overload, rapid cuts, and a lack of traditional narrative.

In 2025, some educational and parenting media have adopted the term *brain rot* to discuss the «Gen Alpha» vocabulary (with key terms in 2025 including *rizz* – «charisma», *skibidi* – «absurd»/«chaotic», *gyatt* – «large backside», *Ohio* – «weird»/«bad», *mewing* – «facial posture technique», etc). Parents expressed their worry about *brain rot* – not just as a slang term used by their children, but as a genuine descriptive for the overstimulation caused by short-form video algorithms: «*The algorithm, for example, behind the «For You Page» on TikTok encourages an endless loop of consumption that can promote desensitization and shortened attention spans. The overstimulation of such pages/digital platforms ultimately causes one to struggle with the ability to consume longer, uncut content and further depletes meaningful involvement in real-life experiences»* (Demystifying, 2025).

Linguistic experts noticed about the incorporation of slang into the annual word of the year practice. On December 1, 2025, Oxford University Press (OUP) officially named *rage bait* as its 2025 Word of the Year. In network slang, *rage bait* is connected with a manipulative tactic focusing on sparking fury in society because of the usage of «online content deliberately designed to elicit anger or outrage by being frustrating, provocative, or offensive, typically posted in order to increase traffic to, online user engagement with a particular web page or social media account» (Oxford, 2025).

Rage bait is a unique lexical unit because it doesn't just describe a thing; it describes a strategy of reality-shaping. It highlights a significant cultural shift in how the society interacts with digital media, moving from seeking information to being manipulated by emotional triggers. This lexical unit models a reality where anger is the primary currency of engagement. So, the vocabulary has become more critical, describing a reality that is actively hostile to human quality and connection. The rise of *rage bait* in 2025 marks a shift from simple curiosity a sensationalized or misleading online content to a highly planned «attention economy» where anger functions as a currency.

The examples of this phenomenon can be found in references from 2024–2025 in media: «*Winta is part of a growing group of online creators making 'rage bait' content, where the goal is simple: record videos, produce memes and write posts that make other users viscerally angry, then bask in the thousands, or even millions, of shares and likes»* (What is rage-baiting, 2025).

In 2025, major brands and public figures were noted for using rage-bait tactics to get attention. So, the celebrity – actress Jennifer Lawrence openly admitted to «rage baiting» using an anonymous TikTok account to argue with strangers about pop culture, illustrating how even public figures recognize the addictive nature of the «argumentative» digital space: «*When Pattinson teased that she had stumbled into an «extremely niche part of TikTok,» Lawrence laughed and admitted, «I guess I rage-bait on TikTok»* (Jennifer Lawrence, 2025).

In 2025 even the political entities adopted the «troll» style of social media to mobilize followers. Joan Donovan, a founder of the Critical Internet Studies Institute and assistant professor of journalism and emerging media studies at Boston University highlighted that «*rage bait» is now a standard tool for government communication to «troll» dissenters, turning official policy updates into viral, divisive spectacles* (Trump, 2025). Thus, the word itself models a reality where engagement is synonymous with conflict.

Another way of how the linguistic representation of the digital experience models the reality can be given in the example of taking a sensitive social issue to create a high-friction headline. The reports by «The Guardian», «The Independent» noted that US federal agencies (such as the Department of Homeland Security) began using provocative, meme-style posts like an ASMR-themed video featuring armed officers with the text «*YOU'RE GOING HO HO HOME»* with the aim of provoking a strong emotional response from both supporters and critics. They use the model *rage bait* to construct a social identity reality. Here, lexical units are chosen specifically to provoke out-grouping, thereby reinforcing in-group identity. The «HO HO HOME» campaign by federal agencies in late 2025 represents a shift where official government communication models reality as a battleground of memes and provocations rather than a source of neutral information (Homeland, 2025). So, the mentioned above the 2025 WOTY serves as an explanation on the current linguistic state of the Internet communication, that models its own reality.

Conclusions. The study of the peculiarities of linguistic modeling the reality through the rubric «Word of the Year» allows to draw the following conclusions:

1. The Dictionaries are more than static word lists that give the definition of various concepts and effect communication, but are active tools in shaping and reflecting the reality: they document everything the society interacts with on a daily basis. The WOTY rubric as a mechanism of linguistic modeling the reality demonstrates that language is highly adaptive. By choosing one lexical unit to represent a year, dictionaries confirm specific realities, structuring various events into a coherent picture of the world.

2. The reality of the period 2022–2025: the analysis of WOTY (2022–2025) shows the transformation of lexical modeling with the focus on nature of modeled reality:

2022: focus on post-pandemic (*goblin mode, gaslighting, permacrisis*);

2023: focus on post-truth (*AI, authentic, hallucinate*);

2024: focus on cognitive saturation (*brain rot*);

2025: focus on digital pathology/stagnation (*slop, rage bait*).

This suggests that the analyzed lexical units do not just track new trends; they represent the cynical reality, that is actively hostile to human quality and connection, and that leads to the psychological retreat of the human being as the information environment is failing him/her.

3. The evolutionary shift: a diachronic comparison demonstrates a profound psychological shift in the modeled reality: from external (*permacrisis*) to internal threat (*brain rot*); from private withdrawal (*goblin mode*); to manipulative behaviour (*rage bait*); from the fear of being deceived (*gaslighting*) to the fear of psychological manipulation (*slop*). The study concludes that modern words function as units that model the reality of new era of AI where the speakers use the language not just to describe the world, but to construct a psychological defense against it.

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