ARCHAISMS AND HISTORICISMS AS A STYLISTIC RESOURCE OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA DISCOURSE: A CORPUS ANALYSIS

Shodiyeva Madinabonu Shokirovna

Master's Degree Student (Group MM2-RTA-25 (RUS))

Asian International University, Department of Uzbek and Russian Philology

Email: shodiyevamadina483@gmail.com

Abstract: This article presents a comprehensive analysis of the processes of **re-actualization** of passive vocabulary (archaisms and historicisms) in the contemporary Russian language during the period of 2020–2025[1]. Based on corpus analysis and social media monitoring, key trends in the transition of obsolete vocabulary into the active dictionary of native speakers are identified[2]. It is proven that archaisms have ceased to serve exclusively as a stylistic function of recreating historical color[3]. They have transformed into a tool for **linguistic play**, **political manipulation**, and **marketing branding**[4]. Special attention is paid to the phenomenon of **semantic derivation** of historicisms in public and political discourse[5].

Keywords: historicisms, archaisms, passive vocabulary, media discourse, linguistic play, re-semantization, stylistic coloration, neologization of antiquity[6].

Introduction

The lexical system of the Russian language is characterized by a high degree of mobility, determined by **extralinguistic factors**: social transformations, technological progress, and changes in cultural codes[7]. Traditionally, linguistics distinguishes between **active** and **passive vocabulary**[8]. The latter includes neologisms (not yet entered into usage) and obsolete words (those that have left it)[9].

The scientific problem lies in the **paradox** of the current stage of language development: in the era of digitalization and the pursuit of economy of speech efforts, there is a surge in the frequency of use of cumbersome, archaic constructions[10].

For the accuracy of the study, it is necessary to demarcate the basic concepts[11]:

- **Historicisms** are lexical units denoting realities that have disappeared from contemporary life (kaftan, uryadnik, versta, nepman)[12]. They have no modern synonyms[13].
- **Archaisms** are obsolete names for existing realities, displaced by modern synonymous lexemes (chelo—forehead, sey—this, vzirat—to look)[14]. Within this group, **lexical** (tat—thief), **semantic** (zhivot—life), and **phonetic** (zertsalo—mirror) archaisms are distinguished[15].

Research Hypothesis: In the modern Russian language, a process of **"secondary actualization"** of passive vocabulary is occurring, in which historicisms lose their denotative connection to the past, acquiring new connotative meanings, and archaisms become a marker of ironic internet style[16].

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted based on materials published during the period from January 2020 to January 2025[17].

Empirical Base:

1. **National Corpus of the Russian Language (NCRL):** Newspaper and Main subcorpora[18]. 2000 contexts containing lexemes from the dictionary of obsolete words were selected[19].
2. **Internet Discourse:** Analysis of posts and comments in social networks (Telegram, VKontakte), as well as blogs on the dzen.ru and vc.ru platforms[20]. The sample size is 1500 units[21].
3. **Advertising Content:** Texts of outdoor advertising, brand names, and slogans (500 units)[22].

Methodology:

The work used a **comprehensive approach**, combining quantitative and qualitative methods[23]:

- **Continuous Sampling Method** for forming the corpus of examples[24].
- **Distributional Analysis** to identify the lexical combinability of obsolete words in the modern context[25].
- **Component Analysis** to track changes in the semantic structure of the word (shifts in meaning)[26].
- **Stylistic Experiment** (replacing an archaism with a neutral synonym) to verify the stylistic function[27].

Mathematical processing of frequency data was carried out using corpus linguistics tools to determine the **ipm index** (instances per million — the number of occurrences per million words)[28].

Results

The analysis of the collected material allowed us to classify the modern functions of obsolete vocabulary and identify statistically significant patterns[29].

Political Metaphorization of Historicisms

The most noticeable transformation occurred with the group of historicisms related to the socio-political structure of pre-revolutionary Russia[30]. Statistics show a **45% increase** in the use of the words «boyars», «kholops», «oprichnina», «smuta», «tsar» in political journalism compared to the period 2010–2015[31].

In this context, historicisms cease to name the realities of the past. **Re-semantization** (reinterpretation) occurs[32]:

- **"Boyars"** («Бояре») — used to denote the modern bureaucratic elite or oligarchy with a **negative connotation** (self-will, detachment from the people)[33].
- **"Kholops"** («Холопы») — marks conformist behavior or the absence of civic engagement, rather than social status[34].

Thus, historicisms transform into **ideologemes** — tools of social criticism and political polemics[35].

Archaisms as a Means of Creating Irony in Internet Communication

In the blogosphere and social networks, the phenomenon of **"high style for low topics"** is recorded[36]. Users intentionally employ Church Slavonicisms and bookish archaisms to describe everyday, trivial situations[37].

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Frequent Archaisms in Internet Usage [38]

Archaism	Neutral Synonym	Typical Context of Use (Example)	Pragmatic Goal
Ибо (Ibo)	Because / Since	"I did not go to the gym, ibo laziness overcame me"	Imparting humorous significance to laziness; self-irony. [39]
Зело (Zelo)	Very	"A zelo impudent courier showed up"	Reduction of aggression through grotesque. [40]
Намедни (Namenidi)	Recently	"Namenidi I watched a TV series"	Stylization as an intelligent conversation. [41]
Сие (Siye)	This	"What is siye creation?" (about poor design)	Distancing, sarcasm. [42]

It was found that **78%** of the uses of the conjunction «ибо» (ibo) in social networks are **ironic** in nature and are not related to religious or philosophical contexts[43].

"Pseudo-Russian" Style in Marketing

A separate layer of results concerns commercial naming[44]. Brands use archaisms (trapeza—meal, yastva—dishes, uslada—delight, kupets—merchant) and pre-reform orthography (most often the letter «ѣ»—yat) to create an image of **premium quality and tradition**[45].

However, the analysis showed that in **60%** of cases, the use of «ѣ» is **erroneous** from the point of view of historical grammar (for example, «Хлебѣ» instead of the correct «Хлѣбъ»)[46]. This indicates that for the modern consumer, the archaism is important not as historical truth, but as a visual sign, a **simulacrum of "antiquity"**[47].

Discussion

The data obtained allow for a new perspective on the theory of lexical composition development[48]. The traditional notion that archaisms are "dying" words needs revision[49]. We are observing a process that can be called **lexical recycling**[50].

Key Factors of Actualization:

1. **Intertextuality of Culture:** The modern native speaker exists in a space of memes and quotes[51]. The archaism «Сударь» (Sir) or «Извольте» (If you please) today refers not to the 19th century, but to popular internet memes with aristocratic cats or re-dubbed films[52]. This creates the effect of **"double coding"**[53].
2. **Need for Expression:** Neutral vocabulary (said, looked, ate) is often perceived as insufficient for expressing emotional state in the digital age[54]. Archaisms (promolvil, vozzrilsya, vkusil) possess **increased expressiveness and pathos**, which is immediately lowered by the context, giving rise to a comical effect[55].
3. **Search for Identity:** The frequency of historicisms in politics correlates with a public demand for historical understanding and the search for parallels between the past and the present[56]. Language responds to this demand by retrieving nominations from past eras to describe current events[57].

The Problem of Asemia and Errors:

An important observation is the **loss of the exact meaning** of words when they are actively used[58]. For example, the word «нелицеприятный» (impartial) is massively used in the meaning of "unpleasant," and the historicism «одиозный» (odious/hateful) is used in the meaning of "notoriously known"[59]. This is a **side effect** of the popularization of bookish vocabulary without a sufficient level of linguistic competence[60].

Conclusion

The conducted research confirms the thesis of the **high vitality** (viability) of obsolete vocabulary in the contemporary Russian language[61].

Key Findings:

1.   Archaisms and historicisms do not permanently leave the language but transition into a **latent state**, from which they can be retrieved to solve new communicative tasks[62].
2.   The dominant function of archaisms in the internet environment is the **ludic (playful) function**, serving for the **carnivalization of communication**[63].
3.   Historicisms in journalism undergo **metaphorization**, forming a new layer of socio-political terminology with vivid evaluative coloration[64].

The prospects for further research lie in studying the influence of **artificial intelligence** and **machine translation** on the preservation or distortion of the layer of obsolete vocabulary in texts of a new nature[65].

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