


IVAN SMIRNOV

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3066-5591>
University of Lodz
Faculty of Philology
Institute of East European Studies
Department of Translation and Linguistics
ul. Pomorska 171/173
90-236, Łódź, Poland
ivan.smirnov@uni.lodz.pl

USE OF THE TERM *JIHAD* IN RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE MEDIA*

Abstract. The article presents examples of the use of the religious term *jihad* in Russian-language media. The author deliberately cites only the most significant examples to illustrate the derivational potential of the lexeme *jihad* in Russian. Particular attention is paid to the accentuation of the interpretation of this term in scientific and media discourse. The interpretations of the lexeme *jihad* presented show that the Russian-language media space is dominated by established connotations associated with war, violence, and aggression. The semantics of the word *jihad* imply action, which is why the term is used in texts as an independent definition of action; when combined with a verb, this factor is reinforced. Russian-language lexicographic sources confirm this point of view, thus forming a single acceptable norm for interpreting the lexeme *jihad* in dictionary entries. A diametrically opposite interpretation of *jihad* is found in Islamic religious sources aimed at the Muslim population and anyone interested in Islamic culture. In order to identify acceptable lexical variants of the word *jihad* and establish possible boundaries of its use, the author of the article classifies examples in terms of thematic affiliation. As the analysis showed, Islamic vocabulary is used across media formats regardless of content genre. The only natural barrier to the free use of Islamic vocabulary in the media is regions with a predominantly Muslim population. In these territories, Islamic terminology is interpreted and used in the media in accordance with Islamic canonical norms.

Keywords: Islam, *jihad*, Islamic vocabulary, media, media discourse

* The author of the article respects believers' religious feelings. The examples presented in the article illustrate the functioning of Islamic vocabulary in the Russian-language media space and are confirmed by relevant references to sources. Russian-language media refers to information in Russian that is freely available through the mass media, without reference to a specific region. Translation of examples by I. Smirnov.

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Introduction

The article discusses the use of the term *jihad* in the media, which, in a broad sense, falls within the field of religious Islamic discourse. Hyarvard rightly notes that media interest in religious vocabulary, particularly fundamental Islamic terminology, has grown in European countries in recent years. This has been driven by migration processes that have led to an increase in the Islamic population and the activation of organisations directly linked to political Islam². It should be emphasised that the loosening of strict social norms and the liberalisation of social rights also contributed to the creation of texts in the media space that can be conditionally linked to an irrational belief. Religious concepts found in journalistic texts can rightly be attributed to this category³. For a correct interpretation of Islamic vocabulary at this stage, it is important to distinguish between political and religious Islam. Islamic terminology becomes the subject of political thought and is transposed into the context of political debate. If we look at this phenomenon more broadly and assume that the Islamic lexicon is essentially based on Arabisms, and that, according to researchers, there are about 450 Arabisms in the Russian language, it becomes clear why religious terms find their place in the media. Further simplification will require more detailed analysis⁴.

Spoken and written constructions containing similar linguistic signs (e.g., the lexeme *jihad*) are apparently classified by recipients according to stylistic affiliation, which ultimately leads to discrepancies in the semantic content of the term. Thus, to understand religious terminology broadly, the following are required: a common worldview among recipients, a common understanding of knowledge, and a stylistic category encompassing syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic categories⁵. Consequently, in accordance with the above argument, the author is capable of creating high-style text and, depending on the situation and subject matter, using Islamic vocabulary for irony or deliberately negative evaluation⁶.

As Prilutskii writes, certain religious terms carry emotional connotations that shape the evaluation of the phenomena described and the formation of a con-

² S. Hjarvard, *Three Forms of Mediatized Religion: Changing the Public Face of Religion*, "State Religion and Church in Russia and Worldwide" 38.2, 2012, p. 39.

³ З. Новоженова, *Жанры эзотерического дискурса в массмедийном пространстве*, "Медиалингвистика" 4.14, 2016, p. 90.

⁴ М. Чаллюб, *Арабские заимствования в русском языке*, "Вестник ВГУ" 1.7, 2009, p. 77.

⁵ A. Kiklewicz, *Теоретические проблемы прагматилистики. Часть 1*, "Acta Neophilologica" 24.1, 2022, p. 13.

⁶ E. Maximovitch, *Leksyka religijna w prasie rosyjskiej a problem poprawności języka*, "Białostockie Archiwum Językowe" 12, 2012, p. 137.

ventional evaluative position in the perceiver's mind⁷. At the same time, religious language remains the primary means of describing religious concepts, and it can be used as a tool of persuasion and manipulation when employed outside the context of religious discourse⁸.

Sociolinguistic studies by scholars who highlight the following versions of the creation of the Islamic Russian sociolect are of considerable interest:

– The first version can be called 'Russification' – Islamic authors try to find synonyms for Arabic words or produce Russian translations of terms⁹.

– The second version is characterised by the fact that the authors and researchers of Islam have a professional linguistic education, and their works can be considered academic research in the full sense of the word¹⁰.

– The third version is characterised by the abundant use of Arabic lexicons regardless of the availability of synonyms and equivalents in Russian. This model increases the distance from the Russian-speaking population, which does not speak Arabic. It should be borne in mind that misunderstandings may also arise with the population that professes Islam but does not have knowledge of Arabic, the language in which religious sources are written¹¹.

It is also worth noting that Islamic terminology is not national in nature, i.e., it is not used within a single state, but is oriented in the media sphere towards the Russian-speaking population, regardless of their nationality or ethnicity. There is also a history behind the fact that Islamic elites focus on using the Russian language to convey information to the Russian-speaking Muslim community, as some believers may not be familiar with religious terminology and do not speak Arabic¹².

Therefore, Islamic words in Russian-language religious discourse cannot be perceived as a monolithic confessional lexical basis, but rather as a multitude of religious terms interpreted by theologians in Arabic, Persian, Russian, and other languages of the peoples of Russia¹³.

⁷ А. Прилуцкий, *Семиотика религии. Философско-религиоведческие исследования*, Санкт-Петербург 2007, p. 147.

⁸ A. Gadomski, *Персуазия, манипуляция и религиозный язык: теоретический аспект*, "Studia Wschodniosłowiańskie" 21, 2021, p. 150.

⁹ М. Кемпер, А. Бустанов, *Ислам и русский язык: социолингвистические аспекты становления общероссийского исламского дискурса*, "Kazan Islamic Review" 1, 2015, p. 215.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 216.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 217.

¹² G. Sibgatullina, *Translating Islam into the Language of the Russian State and the Orthodox Church*, "Religion, State & Society" 47.2, 2019, p. 235.

¹³ A. Bustanov, M. Kemper, *The Russian Orthodox and Islamic Languages in the Russian Federation*, "Slavica Tergestina (Slavia Islamica)" 15, 2013, p. 273.

Use of the term *jihad* in Russian-language media

This article examines how the term *jihad* is used in Russian-language Internet media to describe broader cultural connections, deliberately excluding its polemical religious usage. The main goal is to identify and illustrate various instances of lexical compatibility for the word *jihad*, without emphasizing quantitative analysis. The research includes continuous sampling of texts, regardless of genre or subject, with no focus on article structure. The study intentionally does not separate terminology relating to religious and political Islam, as distinguishing between them could hinder detailed analysis.

In religious discourse, Islamic terminology is used as the language of description, unlike articles, which may be used in contexts with different stylistic characteristics. Scholastic controversies surrounding this term are indirectly reflected in dictionary articles, which present several interpretations of such lexemes or give a single correct interpretation that does not correspond to Islamic canons.

Renowned Islamic theologians interpret the term *jihad* as “struggle for the faith, struggle in defence and for the spread of Islam”¹⁴; there we also find an important clarification that the terms *fatah* and *ghazawat* can be considered synonyms for *jihad* among Muslims, and ‘holy war’ among non-Muslims¹⁵. However, El-Msafer considers this opinion erroneous and clarifies that they became synonyms only in Russian¹⁶. It should be noted that in the Islamic world, the term *jihad* can also be used in the broadest sense when conceptualising phenomena such as “the struggle for harvest, against soil erosion, for the elimination of illiteracy, etc.” Thus, the term, which essentially refers to the ontological status of the individual, is transposed onto natural phenomena and the subject’s everyday actions in the surrounding world. Within the framework of the presented dictionary entries, the opinion of Kadyrova is intriguing. She agrees with the judgement that the verb *jihad* (جاهد) has the core meaning of ‘war’ in its semantic component, but adds that the lexeme can also be interpreted as ‘striving’ or ‘zeal’¹⁷. This clarification relates primarily to the spiritual path of the believer and is less closely tied to the context of war.

It is believed that the mass translation of Islamic terms into Russian began in the 1990s. The model of translating terms by searching for a suitable lexical equivalent in Russian, for example, in the biblical tradition, became established¹⁸.

¹⁴ Г. Милославский et al., *Ислам: Энциклопедический словарь*, Москва 1991, p. 66.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

¹⁶ Х. Эль-Мсафер, *Исламизмы в современном русском языке и дискурсе*, Воронеж 2016, p. 22.

¹⁷ К. Кадырова, *Джихад: историческая традиция и основные тенденции интерпретации в XX – начале XXI вв*, Москва 2016, p. 29.

¹⁸ Ф. Фаткуллина, И. Зубайдуллоев, *Переводы исламской теологической лексики на русский язык (на материале произведений А. Кадыри)*, “Проблемы востоковедения” 88, 2020, p. 66.

It turned out that the expression *Orthodox jihad* had become firmly established in the media space. According to the source, it was first proclaimed during the first Chechen war, and over time, it gained popularity and began to be used by Russian-speaking populations in various countries, such as Syria and Ukraine¹⁹. It would seem that the lexeme *jihad* is only relevant in an Islamic religious context, but this Islamism is also found on the official websites of the Russian Orthodox Church, where it was presumably deliberately launched into the media space by Orthodox figures in 2011²⁰.

(1) Orthodox jihad in Russian propaganda rhetoric (Православный джихад в риторике российской пропаганды)²¹.

(2) Orthodox jihad has arrived in Russia (В Россию пришёл «православный джихад»)²².

(3) Igor Eidman: 'Orthodox jihad at the gates' (Игорь Эйдман: «Православный джихад у ворот»)²³.

It is quite obvious that the term *jihad* can be associated not only with the orthodox component, as shown in the examples below.

(4) Jewish jihad, as it is (Еврейский джихад, как он есть)²⁴.

(5) Chaplains of the Ukrainian National Guard are waging a 'Greek Catholic jihad' (Капелланы Нацгвардии Украины творят «греко-католический джихад»)²⁵.

It should be acknowledged that distinguishing between Islamic lexicon as used by different religious movements is difficult. When the word *jihad* is used outside an Islamic context, it brings with it a fundamental semantic core rooted in mass knowledge about its meaning in Islamic tradition. As a result, the specific identity of those who conduct *jihad*, even from various religious backgrounds, becomes less prominent, while the focus remains on the methods of carrying out *jihad*.

A real-life example is the project by journalist Nadezhda Kevorkova, who was the author and presenter of the documentary series *Jihad of Russian Literature*²⁶. Such uses of the term lead to the construction of *jihad in Russian literature*,

¹⁹ <https://sprotyv.info/obshchestvo/pravoslavnyj-dzhihad-naciya-agressor-pozhinaet-plo-dy-prestupnoj-ideologii> [17.05.2025].

²⁰ <https://pravoslavie.ru/47219.html> [17.05.2025].

²¹ <https://uc.od.ua/columns/1533/1230117> [18.05.2025].

²² <https://macos.livejournal.com/1602865.html> [18.05.2025].

²³ <https://www.newsru.com/blog/28Sep2017/pravoslavie.html> [18.05.2025].

²⁴ https://ru.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3771380 [18.05.2025].

²⁵ <https://regnum.ru/article/2318797> [18.05.2025].

²⁶ <https://goloslama.com/news.php?id=32684> [18.05.2025].

unequivocally depriving the lexeme *jihad* of subjectivity, thereby contributing to the desubjectification of the action. The following examples from the author can be cited in the same way:

(6) The Jihad of Islamic Culture (Джихад исламской культуры).

(7) The jihad of musical creativity (Джихад музыкального творчества).

There is no doubt that the recipient, when perceiving such examples, assumes that *jihad* can be carried out by an individual or a group of individuals.

Particular attention should be paid to the fact that the semantics of the term include an action factor, i.e. this religious concept is not static, and therefore, regardless of its formal characteristics, the noun *jihad* has the semantics of action. That is why, despite the arguments in favour of the semantic component, the language retains the pattern of adding the verb to the lexeme *jihad*²⁷, for example:

(8) To wage jihad in the name of faith (Совершить джихад во имя веры).

(9) Carry out the jihad promised to my family (Выполнить обещанный родным джихад).

(10) Waging jihad against one's own vices (Вести джихад со своими пороками).

(11) Embark on the path of jihad (Встать на путь джихада).

(12) To actually participate in jihad (Действительно участвовать в джихаде).

(13) Resolutely commence jihad (Решительно начать джихад).

(14) Call believers to jihad (Призывать верующих к джихаду).

The above are the most frequent stable expressions combining the noun *джихад* with a verb. Of considerable interest in explaining this phenomenon in this case is the form of the verb derived from the noun *джихад* – *джихаднуться*. In this example, the base form is the noun *джихад*, from which the verb is derived.

(15) Если джихаднуться с плазмой в руках, то оно засчитается в ачивку псайкера²⁸.

A review of the examples given suggests, on the one hand, that *jihad* can be put into practice, i.e., have tangible (visible) physical characteristics, but on

²⁷ These examples were obtained by continuous sampling from the Russian National Corpus (RNC), modified and supplemented by the author of the article.

²⁸ <https://2ch.hk/vg/arch/2023-07-16/res/46410246.html> [18.05.2025]. The example is presented in Russian, as translation may result in a loss of the original meaning.

the other hand, it can also have intangible idealistic characteristics, such as the spiritual path of a believer. It should be noted that the spiritual component is primary and leads to specific physical actions.

The lexeme *jihad* is frequently used in texts on technological progress.

(16) European and Russian policies to counter cyberterrorism (using the example of the fight against ‘cyber jihad’. (Европейская и российская политика противодействия кибертерроризму на примере борьбы с «кибер-джихадом») ²⁹.

(17) The phenomenon of ‘cyberjihad’ in postmodern geopolitics: a political science analysis. (Феномен «киберджихада» в геополитике постмодерна: политологический анализ) ³⁰.

(18) Cyber jihad and the Muslim metaverse: how does the West view Islam on the internet? («Кибер-джихад» и «мусульманская метавселенная»: как Запад видит ислам в интернете?) ³¹.

Apparently, the author’s examples may also be appropriate: *виртуальный джихад, цифровой джихад, он-лайн джихад, электронный джихад*.

It is worth noting that the combination of the word *jihad* with computer themes is found in the media sphere of the Islamic regions of Russia. Thus, there is a noticeable semantic connection between computer technologies and the Islamic religious environment. In addition, as the examples show, different spellings of the word are still found in official sources, cf.: *кибер-джихад* and *киберджихад*.

In the media, some examples of the use of the term *jihad* appear once in texts; such examples can be tentatively linked to gender, for example:

(19) Peaceful gender jihad. How and why Muslim feminism became possible. (Мирный гендерный джихад. Как и почему стал возможен мусульманский феминизм) ³².

As for the interpretation of this example, it can be said that there is a violation of the truthfulness of knowledge, i.e., that *jihad* is characterized by peaceful action in the context of gender relations. The contrast in this example is also reinforced by the phrase ‘*Muslim feminism*’, in which the political movement for women’s rights is viewed within the boundaries of Islamic ethics. There are examples relating to sexual themes:

²⁹ Т. Литвинова, *Европейская и российская политики противодействия кибертерроризму (на примере борьбы с «кибер-джихадом»)*, “Национальная безопасность / nota bene” 3, 2020, p. 32.

³⁰ О. Дроботенко, *Феномен «киберджихада» в геополитике постмодерна: политологический анализ*, “PolitBook” 2, 2019, p. 25.

³¹ <https://islam-today.ru/blog/gsv-rossia-islamskij-mir/kiber-dzihad-i-musulmanskaa-metavselennaa-kak-zapad-vidit-islam-v-internete> [18.05.2025].

³² <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3276446> [19.05.2025].

(20) Girls are being sent on ‘sexual jihad’ to Egypt and Syria. (Девушек отправляют на «сексуальный джихад» в Египет и Сирию)³³.

The interpretations of *jihad* outlined above demonstrate that the semantic component of the lexeme encompasses the meaning of war in the broadest sense, with associations including aggression, terror, violence, and cruelty. Comparable associations appear to exist in other countries. For instance, in Poland, interest in the term *jihad* increased in Internet search engines following terrorist attacks in Europe and the United States, suggesting that the word is commonly linked with war and terrorism in public perception³⁴.

This position seems completely erroneous to those researchers who live in regions with a predominantly Muslim population, are well versed in the canons of the religion, and adhere to the norms of preserving and disseminating the cultural meanings of Islam. For them, the semantic boundaries characterise *jihad* as peaceful, individualistic, and spiritual zeal in the pursuit of faith. Different interpretations of fundamental (basic) Islamic terminology lead to divergent religious worldviews, which are expressed through vocabulary in everyday and scientific language.

Dogmatic Islamic religious vocabulary used in everyday contexts and political debates clearly occupies a central position in the sentence; i.e., the semantics of the religious term determines the meaning of the entire sentence. One can interpret the opinion of Polish researcher Kiklewicz that Islamic words are often presented exclusively in headlines, thereby creating an ideological religious attitude in the reader’s mind from the outset, which then spreads to all the information in the article³⁵. Often, this is an inseparable combination of a verb and a noun, and given that the lexeme *jihad* has the characteristics of a verb in its semantic component, it rightfully occupies a central place in article headlines. Multimedia communication texts that use Islamic terms go beyond the boundaries of specialised religious discourse, which exists as a closed space. The mixing of religious discourse with the conceptualisation of events through Islamic vocabulary is clearly a suggestive means of influencing the reader. On the other hand, it would be wrong to establish the real reasons that prompted the authors of the materials to use religious vocabulary in each individual case, and generalising the motives without a detailed explanation of each religious concept would seem like fiction.

³³ https://tengrinews.kz/near_east/devusek-otpravliaiut-na-seksualnyi-dzixad-v-egipet-i-siriiu-237926/ [19.05.2025].

³⁴ P. Mazur, *Czy dżihad to ideologia? O niekonsekwencjach terminologicznych wokół „walki na ścieżce Boga”*, “Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia de Securitate” 9.2, 2019, p. 21.

³⁵ A. Kiklewicz, *Политическая пропаганда в современных российских сми: эпистемологический аспект*, “Przegląd Wschodnioeuropejski” 6.2, 2015, p. 197.

Conclusion

In certain regions of Russia with a predominantly Muslim population, there are no examples of the term *jihad* being used outside of religious texts. In this case, it is worth acknowledging that the historical reflection of religious terminology has been lost; in essence, journalists who use Islamic terms do not realise that they are part of a historical religious context. The moral feelings and judgments of a particular group of people have consequences only within the specific boundaries of the functioning of this vocabulary. The existential choice of vocabulary for believers is different from that for people who do not profess Islam. As the examples show, the situation is reversed in the media sphere, which is not connected to Islamic culture. The trajectory of development is such that Islamic lexicon is increasingly found in the headlines of articles unrelated to religious issues. Apparently, in media texts, the term *jihad* should be considered not in a religious but in a political sense, and it is necessary to recognise the conscious distancing of the authors of the articles from Muslim ideas about sacred space. Despite the differences, the examples presented in the article should not be simplified; rather, they should be accepted as metaphorical expressions in media texts. Journalists often reveal their attitude towards Islamic culture in their headlines. It can be stated unequivocally that the strengthening of Islam's position in Russia and the active spread of Islamic vocabulary in the Russian media community contribute to the normalisation of Islamic terminology³⁶.

A monistic interpretation of the meaning of the term *jihad*, based on the idea that the only substance of *jihad* is force, is not definitive, since such interpretations cannot be considered legitimate in religious debate. The most important problem remains: *who can be the subject performing jihad, and what is the object of jihad?* Therefore, the issues presented in the article are not considered in scientific research, but rather prevail in closed religious communities.

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³⁶ O. Александрова, Е. Захарова, *Особенности употребления и перевода лексики ислама в русскоязычных и англоязычных новостных текстах*, "Вестник РУДН" 1, 2013, p. 41.

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